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The Integration of Women into the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, Post-World War II to the Mid 1990s

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**The Integration of Women into the Royal Navy and
the Royal Air Force, Post-World War II to the
Mid 1990s**

Kathleen Louise Sherit

King's College, London

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

23 August 2013

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Abstract

The history of women in Britain's armed forces is dominated by wartime participation and, latterly, explanations of wider employment of servicewomen in the 1990s. Women's service is mainly attributed to lessening the need for men. Reasons suggested for 1990s' developments have included social factors, technology, servicewomen's career aspirations and policy-makers' attitudes. However, army issues overshadow accounts that emerge from the other Services.

When regular service was introduced, women were excluded from seagoing, flying and weapons' training. Terms of service on marriage and pregnancy ensured careers were long-term opportunities only for childless women. This thesis accounts for how the reputedly egalitarian Royal Air Force (RAF) integrated its servicewomen, expanding their employment into armed guard duties and flying 'non-combat' aircraft, while asserting that women's exclusion from combat was upheld. This contrasted with the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS). As a separate, shore-based organisation, it illustrated the conservative approach taken by the naval authorities. Yet it was the Royal Navy (RN) that opened main combat roles to women first.

This thesis argues that the Admiralty reluctantly established a peacetime WRNS in response to Air Ministry and War Office policy. It restricted women's employment until failure to adjust to social change led to a personnel crisis in the late 1980s. Unable to follow the RAF's piecemeal widening of women's roles, seagoing in warships was approved in 1990, overturning women's exclusion from main combat roles. RAF combat jet flying followed as a consequence. However, for the vast majority of airwomen, the 1982 decision to introduce weapons' training made them as combatant as male counterparts. Exclusion from land warfare continued; the RN and the RAF followed the army's lead. The armed forces' right to be different from civilian maternity policy succumbed to legal challenge rather than commitment to modernising terms of employment.

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Abbreviations and Terminology

ACNP	Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel
ACNS	Assistant Chief of Naval Staff
AEW	Airborne Early Warning
AFA	Air Force Act
AFBSC	Air Force Board Standing Committee
AFO	Admiralty Fleet Order
AFPRB	Armed Forces Pay Review Body
AGARD	Advisory Group for Aerospace Research and Development
AHB	Air Historical Branch
<i>Air Force List</i>	Annual publication listing all officers
ALM	Air Loadmaster (formerly Air Quartermaster)
AMO	Air Ministry Order
AMP	Air Member for Personnel (Head of RAF personnel)
AP	Air Publication
AQM	Air Quartermaster (subsequently Air Loadmaster)
ATA	Air Transport Auxiliary
ATC	Air Training Corps
ATS	Auxiliary Territorial Service
AUS	Assistant under Secretary
BLSA	British Library Sound Archive
BR	Book of Reference (Admiralty publication)
Category	Designation of work of naval non-commissioned ranks
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff - Head of the RAF
CCF	Combined Cadet Force
ChCh	Christ Church Oxford
CNS	Chief of the Naval Staff - also known as the First Sea Lord
DASA	Defence Analytical Services and Advice
DGNMT	Director General Naval Manning and Training
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Security
Director WAAF	Head of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force
Director WRAF	Head of the Women's Royal Air Force
Director WRNS	Head of the Women's Royal Naval Service
DUS	Deputy Under Secretary
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
ECAB	Executive Committee of the Army Board
First Lord of the Admiralty	Secretary of State for the Navy prior to the Admiralty being subsumed within the MOD
First Sea Lord	Head of the Royal Navy
FOI	Freedom of Information
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
G officer	Female officer employed in administration (Air Force)
HC Deb	House of Commons Debates
HMS	Her Majesty's Ship
IET	Institute of Engineering and Technology
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JNCO	Junior Non-commissioned Officer

MA	Military Assistant
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NAAFI	Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes
NAO	National Audit Office
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NAVB	Navy Board
<i>Navy List</i>	Annual publication listing all officers
<i>Navy News</i>	Monthly publication, publicly available
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
NDA	Naval Discipline Act
NMRN	National Museum of the Royal Navy
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
PA	Parliamentary Archive
PAC	Parachute and Cable (World War II anti-aircraft device)
PPO Committee	Principal Personnel Officers' Committee
PUS	Permanent under Secretary
PVR	Premature Voluntary Release
QARNNS	Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAFM	Royal Air Force Museum
<i>RAF News</i>	Fortnightly publication, publicly available
Ratings	Non-commissioned naval personnel
RFA	Royal Fleet Auxiliary
RM	Royal Marines
RN	Royal Navy
SAM	Surface to Air Missile
SDA	Sex Discrimination Act
Second Sea Lord	Head of Naval Personnel
SMP	Statutory Maternity Pay
SNCO	Senior Non-commissioned Officer
SS	Steam Ship
Taceval	Tactical evaluation
TNA	The National Archive
UAS	University Air Squadron
USAF	United States Air Force
USofS	Under Secretary of State
VCAS	Vice Chief of the Air Staff
WAAF	Women's Auxiliary Air Force
WRAC	Women's Royal Army Corps
WRAF	Women's Royal Air Force
Wren	Member of the Women's Royal Naval Service
WRNS	Women's Royal Naval Service
X-factor	Supplement to military pay introduced in 1970
YTS	Youth Training Scheme

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women who qualified as pilots in the early 1990s, as well as making the Museum's collection of documents available to me.

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Introduction

In 2007, Rear Admiral Richard Cobbold recalled that, as captain of HMS *Brilliant* in 1990, he had 'developed a view that the warriors in a ship sat at workstations using computers, controlling weapons. ... in the surface Navy there would be no reason whatsoever for women not to have any of the jobs.'¹ The frigate, the first to have female sailors on its complement, deployed to the Gulf War in January 1991. Flight Lieutenant Jo Salter, the first woman to qualify as a ground attack pilot, described joining 617 Squadron to fly Tornado jets, becoming 'combat ready' in 1994 and patrolling the 'no-fly zone' over the north of Iraq.² These developments were well beyond the original intentions of the Admiralty and the Air Ministry for the employment of servicewomen. Having women on 617 Squadron, famous for the Ruhr dams bombing in 1943, or in HMS *Brilliant*, with its battle honours of the English Channel (1940-45), the Atlantic (1941-3) and North Africa (1942), would have been unthinkable in the 1940s when retention of women in the armed forces was agreed.

On the introduction of regular service in 1949, women were not employed in combat roles. Subsequently, for women in the Royal Air Force (RAF), there was a gradual erosion of exclusions: a small cohort gained aircrew status when their trade of air quartermaster was upgraded in 1962; weapons training was introduced in the early 1980s; employment as rear crew in airborne early warning aircraft³ was approved in principle in 1984; pilot and navigator roles in unarmed aircraft were opened in 1989 and in armed aircraft from December 1991. However, it was the Royal Navy (RN), in opening seagoing in warships from 1990 and flying in the Fleet Air Arm from July 1991, that allowed women to serve in main combat roles first. With exclusion from combat overturned, new boundaries for servicewomen's roles emerged in the early 1990s. Women could not serve in submarines or in land warfare. The Army's

¹ Rear Admiral Richard Cobbold, interviewed by the author, 18 Jun 2007, transcript p.3. Rank titles are listed at Appendix 1. Details of interviewees are at Appendix 2.

² Flight Lieutenant Jo Salter, interviewed by the author, 20 Sep 2007, transcript p.1 and p.14. Under this 'no-fly zone' policy, Iraq was denied use of its airspace over the north and south of its territory following the First Gulf War.

³ The role of airborne early warning aircraft was to detect, track, identify and report aircraft.

infantry, armoured corps and artillery, and the equivalents of Royal Marines (RM) and RAF Regiment, remained closed to women.⁴

In addition to restrictions on roles because of exclusion from combat, women's military careers were shaped by terms and conditions of service. These derived from both civilian and armed forces' norms. In particular, developments in employment of servicewomen must be understood in the context of policies on and attitudes towards marriage and pregnancy. In common with much public sector employment after the war, there was no formal marriage bar.⁵ However, policies on postings and accommodation created barriers to married life. In addition, women who married while in the Services had the right to leave at shorter notice than other personnel. Pregnant women were obliged to leave. While restrictions on married service were eased, dismissal on pregnancy was maintained until October 1990.

The women's Services differed in their organisation as they had done in the Second World War. The Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) continued, as in wartime, as an entity separate from, and in shore-based support of, the Royal Navy. Although Wrens⁶ enjoyed the trappings of rank and uniforms, they did not come under military law until 1977, and so initially served as uniformed civilians. The Air Ministry intended the RAF to be integrated. Rather than persisting with its wartime separate service, from 1 February 1949 women were attested or commissioned into the RAF. The term 'Women's Royal Air Force' (WRAF) was intended for administrative purposes. The Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) was a half-way house between the WRAF and the WRNS. Like the former, women came under military law, but like the latter they were in a separate corps. As a consequence of wider employment, women transferred from the WRNS into the Royal Navy in November 1993. Reference to the 'WRAF' ceased in April 1994. Following decisions to open more support roles to women in the army, the WRAC was disbanded in April 1992. From that date, women joined other corps of the army.

⁴ The Royal Artillery was opened subsequently to women in 1998.

⁵ For example, the marriage bar was abolished in the civil service in 1946. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), p.342.

⁶ Women in the WRNS were commonly referred to as 'Wrens' and that term is used in this thesis.

This thesis explores why and how women were integrated into the RN and the RAF, from the establishment of regular service following the Second World War to the mid-1990s, by which time women were serving in main combat roles and reference to women's Services had ceased. In doing so, it identifies why regular service was introduced after the war and retained as the requirement for personnel subsequently declined. It investigates women's changing relationship to combat by establishing how acceptable employment of women was expanded, why the Royal Navy opened main combat roles before the Royal Air Force, why the new boundary line of servicewomen's employment was drawn at land warfare and submarine service, and the consequences of these changes for the WRNS and the WRAF. It examines relationships between armed forces' personnel policies and societal norms by determining developments in women's terms and conditions of service, regulations and attitudes towards marriage and pregnancy and how they affected women's careers. It explains to what extent the armed forces reacted to employment laws from which they were exempt.⁷ In addition, it establishes the significance of the differences in organisation and status of the WRNS and the WRAF, particularly in respect of the authority and influence exercised by their Directors.

Scholarly accounts of the establishment of women's regular service are limited. However, Lucy Noakes has provided a history of why the War Office supported the retention of regular servicewomen after the Second World War. She quoted Lesley Whateley, Director of the ATS at the end of the war, as believing that continued service was a 'foregone conclusion'.⁸ However, Noakes contended that prospects for military careers 'must have appeared fairly fragile, as the government was reluctant to commit itself to such a policy'.⁹ Drawing on the speech made by George Isaacs (Minister for Labour and National Service) announcing in the House of Commons that regular service for women was to be introduced, she concluded that the decision to create a women's corps for the peacetime army was 'contingent on the military's need for men, in this case as a means of reducing the demands of an unpopular

⁷ For example, the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) which required equal treatment at work and in provision of goods and services, the Employment Protection Act (1975) which gave working women maternity leave rights, and the Social Security Act (1986) which introduced statutory maternity pay.

⁸ Leslie Whateley, *As Thoughts Survive* (London: Hutchinson, 1949), quoted in Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.146.

⁹ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, p.146.

policy of national service.'¹⁰ She noted that, as in the war, women were employed in a separate corps as 'the question of integrating the ATS into the regular army simply never arose.'¹¹ She concluded that, as had been the case in the war, the purpose of employing women in the army was to 'support and replace men, freeing them for the higher status occupation of combat'.¹²

Understandings of what constituted a 'combat role' and who was designated as 'combatant' are essential to the history of women's Services. As a matter of principle, women were said to be non-combatant, as they had been during the Second World War. However, it is important to recognise that the nature and extent of servicemen's combatant duties differed between the Services. Characteristics of combat roles included responsibility for killing the enemy in direct or close contact (e.g. infantry action) or at a distance (e.g. air or naval action); risk of death, injury or capture; offensive action (seeking out the enemy); and defensive action (including defending a base area and self-defence).

The Royal Navy used a concept described as 'all of one company'. All members of a ship's company were recognised as sharing risk and all sailors were regarded as being in combat roles, whatever their job aboard ship. Wrens, being excluded from ships' complements until 1990, were therefore not in combat roles.

For the RAF, Cynthia Enloe's concept of a 'hierarchy of militarized masculinities' is particularly apposite.¹³ Pilots of fighter and ground attack jets (fast jets) were at the pinnacle, with higher status than crews of multi-engine aircraft and helicopters. Within fast jet squadrons, flying 'single-seat' aircraft (crewed only by a pilot rather than also having a navigator, as in other fast jets) afforded the greatest status. However, only a minority of RAF personnel were employed as aircrew. Most worked in 'ground trades'. They served predominantly at fixed bases that could be hundreds of miles away from the enemy's forces. Nevertheless, such bases were vulnerable to attack and they were defended by the RAF Regiment, akin to an army

¹⁰ Ibid, p.147.

¹¹ Ibid, p.149.

¹² Ibid, p.156.

¹³ Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War*, (London: University of California Press, 1993), p.56.

regiment. In the event of an attack, the Regiment could be supplemented by other RAF personnel from ground trades, trained to use small arms.¹⁴ Airmen's potential liability to undertake armed action in defence of their base, and women's exclusion from that task until the 1980s, was the basis for describing ground-based airmen as having combat roles and airwomen as not being employed in combat. Although women shared the risk of coming under attack, this was insufficient for them to be regarded as combatant.

With the use of weapons in defence of a base being low in the combat hierarchy, there is a need to differentiate it from other types of combat. This thesis uses the term 'main combat roles' to describe seagoing and flying roles in order to distinguish them from the use of small arms in defence of a base.

The issue of what constitutes combat has dominated the historiography on women in the armed forces. Historians have tended to concentrate on wartime service, with emphasis on army women's relationship to combat as evidenced by their roles in anti-aircraft artillery batteries in the Second World War. This has been a popular case study as scholars benefit from a rich collection of sources including the memoirs of General Sir Frederick Pile, who ran Anti-Aircraft Command throughout the war,¹⁵ testimonies from female participants and War Office files in the National Archive. Women were not permitted officially to undertake all the duties. Barred from loading and firing the guns, they were said to be non-combatants. General Pile described the distinction between those who aimed guns (women) and those who fired them (men) as 'muddled thinking'.¹⁶ He regarded women as combatants, believing that the ban on women actually firing at the enemy was a political issue which he was not prepared to challenge at the time.¹⁷

Scholars have analysed the effectiveness of the mixed batteries, the impact on men and women who were employed in the work, the conflict for women between

¹⁴ Small arms included sub-machine guns, rifles and pistols.

¹⁵ General Sir Frederick Pile, *Ack-Ack: Britain's Defence against Air Attack during the Second World War*, (London: George G Harrap & Co Ltd, 1949).

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.193.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.186 and p.193.

membership of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS)¹⁸ and self-identification as 'gunners', the description of the women's work as non-combatant, and public and political perceptions at the time.¹⁹ Lucy Noakes, in her history of women in the British Army in the first half of the twentieth century, observed that artillery women 'remained lower status members of a separate organisation, on lower pay [than men] and, defined as non-combatant, unable to be awarded combat medals.'²⁰

Little has been written about policies on women's regular service until the expansion of employment opportunities in the 1990s. Again, there has been an emphasis on the army and female soldiers' relationship to combat. For example, Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter examined the opening of roles for women in the Royal Artillery, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and the Royal Engineers, and the continuing exclusion from the infantry and armoured corps in 1998. They suggested that increased opportunities for women were publicly attributed to the armed forces' intention more closely to represent society as a whole, removing artificial barriers and providing equality of opportunity in order to attract the best recruits. However, they ascribed change also to necessity, as the armed forces were 'fishing for recruits in a shrinking pool of available fit, willing, suitable young male labour'.²¹

Like Woodward and Winter, Joanna Bourke was primarily interested in women in the army. She also gave emphasis to the dwindling supply of young men in driving the armed forces to increase women's participation from the 1970s onwards. She added the importance of women's liberation, greater prevalence of mixed workplaces in civilian employment, less need for physical aggression as weapons

¹⁸ The Auxiliary Territorial Service was the women's army corps in the Second World War.

¹⁹ For example: Margaret R Higonnet & Patrice L-R Higonnet, 'The Double Helix', in Margaret R Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 31-47; Roy Terry, *Women in Khaki: the Story of the British Woman Soldier*, (London: Columbus Books, 1988), pp.152-8; D'Ann Campbell, 'Women in Combat: the World War II Experience in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union', *The Journal of Military History*, Vol.57, No.2, Apr 1993, pp. 301-23; Gerard J. DeGroot, 'Whose Finger on the Trigger? Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries and the Female Combat Taboo', *War in History*, Vol.4, No.4, 1997, pp. 434-53; Jutta Schwarzkopf, 'Combatant or Non-combatant? The Ambiguous Status of Women in British Anti-Aircraft Batteries during the Second World War', *War & Society*, Vol.28, No.2, Oct 2009, pp.105-131; Georgina Natzio, 'Homeland Defence: British Gunners, Women and Ethics during the Second World War', in Celia Lee and Paul Edward Strong (eds.), *Women in War: from Home Front to Front Line* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2012), pp.87-100.

²⁰ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, p.120.

²¹ Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter, *Sexing the Soldier: The Politics of Gender and the Contemporary British Army* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.42-3.

became more technologically based, and interest from women wanting to undertake more roles.²²

While Woodward, Winter and Bourke concentrated on the army, the military sociologists Christopher Dandeker and Mady Wechsler Segal, in work based on official documents, statistics and interviews with policy-makers conducted between 1991-4, examined expansion of women's roles in all three British armed forces in the late twentieth century. They identified four factors, similar to Bourke's, that contributed to decisions to widen women's employment. First, they noted pressures from society, such as demography, public attitudes towards gender roles and legislation. Second, there was an increasing demand for better career opportunities by servicewomen. Third, technological change led to a 'relative decline in the emphasis placed on physical prowess and aggressiveness', a factor that they thought probably varied in importance across the Services and was most relevant in the army.²³ Finally, they added the need to consider the attitudes of policy-makers responding to the other three factors, with those 'socialized into the values of the 1960s and early 1970s' being 'less commit[ted] to traditional views of military women's employment'.²⁴ Dandeker and Segal concluded that, while demographic factors in the late 1980s and early 1990s influenced thinking in the MOD, social, political and legal pressures were more important in bringing about new roles for servicewomen.²⁵ Writing as post-Cold War cuts to the armed forces were being implemented, they suggested that continued wider military employment of women would signify the importance of equality of opportunity as the key factor in these policy changes.²⁶ Their assessment has an unstated premise that women's employment still needed to be justified in the 1990s, rather than women having access to military careers equally with men.

²² Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (Great Britain: Basic Books, 1999), p.342-3.

²³ Christopher Dandeker and Mady Wechsler Segal, 'Gender Integration in Armed Forces: Recent Policy Developments in the United Kingdom', *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol.23, No.1, Fall 1996 pp.37-40.

²⁴ Ibid, p.41.

²⁵ Ibid, pp.43-4.

²⁶ Ibid, pp.30-1 and Christopher Dandeker, 'New Times for the Military: Some Sociological Remarks on the Changing Role and Structure of the Armed Forces of the Advanced Societies,' *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol.45, No.4, 1994, p.649.

Dandeker and Segal appeared to attribute RAF combat roles only to aircrew when they noted that 'the total number of RAF personnel actually in combat - even in wartime - is very small.'²⁷ Although they remarked that airwomen were trained 'in the use of firearms for defensive purposes' from the early 1980s,²⁸ they did not assign any notable significance to this development.

In the early 1990s, women's increased employment stopped short of main land warfare roles or submarine service. Exclusion from the infantry and the armoured corps has been explained by Woodward and Winter as being based on women being presumed to be disruptive to cohesion in fighting units.²⁹ Resultant undermining of male bonding was expected to have a detrimental impact on operational effectiveness.³⁰ However, Dandeker and Segal noted that that argument was perceived by army authorities as too vague to withstand legal challenge. They observed a move towards an explanation that there was a lack of privacy and decency in living conditions in the field, this being an acceptable justification under the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) for differential treatment. They also thought that this reasoning could be used to justify women's exclusion from some naval vessels.³¹

In addition to the discourse on combat, scholars have also commented on the importance of the military's relationship with norms of civilian employment and society and men and women's attitudes towards, and expectations of, their military careers. In his examination of race, gender and sexuality in the army in the late twentieth century, Hew Strachan observed that the army asserted a 'right' or 'need' to be different from civil society on the grounds of protecting combat effectiveness.³² Dandeker and Segal reported use by an officer of the expression 'the right [of the armed forces] to be different' in connection with gender integration in the early 1990s.³³ Dandeker further noted this principle being used during General Sir Michael Rose's tenure as Adjutant General in the mid-1990s as the justification for

²⁷ Dandeker and Segal, 'Gender Integration in Armed Forces', p.34.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Woodward and Winter, *Sexing the Soldier*, p.19.

³⁰ 'Operational' or 'combat' effectiveness means the ability to prevail over an enemy.

³¹ Dandeker and Segal, 'Gender Integration in Armed Forces', pp.33-4.

³² Hew Strachan (ed.), *The British Army: Manpower and Society into the Twenty-First Century* (London and Portland Oregon: Frank Cass, 2000), p.xvii.

³³ Dandeker and Segal, 'Gender Integration in Armed Forces', p.40.

the exclusion of homosexuals from the armed forces.³⁴ However, Dandeker argued that it was important for the armed forces to be 'responsive to the changing society which they defend, that pays for them, and without whose support they can do little.'³⁵

While Christopher Dandeker emphasised differences between the Services and society in the 1990s, Cathy Downes suggested that there was a trend 'to reduce but not eliminate the gap'.³⁶ She cited as evidence the increasing percentage of servicemen who were married, the rise in home ownership, spouses' greater employment aspirations, and military pay (from 1970) being based on comparability with civilian jobs.³⁷ David French observed that, from the 1950s, as the percentage of married soldiers in the regular army increased, the needs of married men were a key problem that authorities attempted to address through cutting down unaccompanied postings, provision of more married accommodation and reducing the frequency of moves.³⁸ Downes and French wrote about trends and personnel policies affecting servicemen. However, similar issues need to be addressed in respect of servicewomen, with the addition of the vexed issue of pregnancy.

Jeanne Boydston invited historians not to assume the primacy of gender but to consider it as 'nested in, mingled with and inseparable from the cluster of other factors.'³⁹ While gender is ever-present in this history, women's integration into the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force involved a number of dichotomies: the Navy's segregation of seagoing from shore-based work compared with the RAF's divide between flying and ground-based roles; organisational factors of the integrated RAF contrasted with the separate WRNS and the consequent authority or influence of senior women officers; airwomen's military status versus Wrens' civilian standing until 1977; terms and conditions of service for married compared with single

³⁴ Christopher Dandeker, 'On "The Need to be Different": Recent Trends in Military Culture', in Hew Strachan (ed.), *The British Army*, note 2, p185. General Rose was Adjutant General (Head of Army Personnel) between 1995-97.

³⁵ Ibid, p173.

³⁶ Cathy Downes, 'Great Britain', in Charles C. Moskos and Frank R. Wood (eds.), *The Military: More than Just a Job?* (London: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1988), p.163.

³⁷ Ibid, p.175.

³⁸ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, C.1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.317-20.

³⁹ Jeanne Boydston, 'Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis', *Gender & History*, Vol.20, No.3, November 2008, p.576.

personnel; differing aspirations between servicewomen and their female senior officers; and men's career and family priorities as well as women's. In addition, it is important to recognise constraints imposed by the defence budget. Policy-makers in the period covered by this history were, for the most part, working with declining financial resources. The value for money in employing women rather than men was a persistent issue.

The historiography's emphasis on the army presents an incomplete account of women's regular service in the second half of the twentieth century. This thesis seeks to broaden the understanding of the fragile nature of the decision to employ women's Services in the aftermath of the war and to retain them as the size of the armed forces subsequently reduced. It suggests that the 'lessening the need for men' argument, used in accounts about the army, is an insufficient explanation for the existence of the WRNS and the WRAF. In addition, releasing men for more important work was not an issue for the Royal Air Force. Employing fewer men in ground-based work did not generate candidates of the quality needed for aircrew duties. However, as will be seen, debate about the purpose of the WRNS fluctuated between women releasing men for the fleet or blocking shore-based jobs required to give men respite from seagoing. What emerges in policy discussions in the Service Ministries is a set of arguments that vary over the period from a belief that regular servicewomen implied losing an equivalent number of more employable servicemen, to the post-war assessment that women were an essential part of preparations for a future major war, to seeing servicewomen as a means of minimising risks of poor recruitment on reversion to all-volunteer forces, a cost-effective means of managing decline in requirement for personnel in the early 1960s, and to valuing women's skills in place of lower quality male volunteers. However, the existence of the separate, shore-based WRNS is revealed as more precarious than that of women in the RAF who served interchangeably with men on operational stations.

Nevertheless, the apparently 'conservative' Royal Navy opened main combat roles before the reputedly 'egalitarian' Royal Air Force and this has to be explained. This thesis adds evidence of the weight to be placed on Dandeker and Segal's social factors and attitudes of policy-makers and servicewomen. It suggests that

technological factors are important in terms of demands placed on educational attainment and capacity to absorb training, rather than in terms of declining reliance on strength. It adds to Dandeker and Segal's analysis the need to account for interactions between the Services' policies. The Navy's inability to follow the examples of the RAF and the army in piecemeal additions to women's employment resulted in its revolutionary step of admitting women to main combat roles. Once the Navy had breached the principle that women could not be employed in overtly combat roles, the RAF was obliged to follow by opening fast jet flying sooner than it otherwise would. However, this thesis argues that, for the vast majority of women in the RAF, the earlier decision to train them in the use of small arms made them combatants to the same extent as their ground-based male colleagues were. However, this development was not described as being a combat role at the time. Avoiding describing women's roles as combat because of public or political sensitivities, as the anti-aircraft artillery experience of the Second World War showed, is seen to persist until seagoing in warships was opened to the WRNS. In drawing the new boundary line of servicewomen's employment at exclusion from land warfare, this thesis suggests that the Air Force and Admiralty Boards were content to concede primacy in policy-making to the Army.

This thesis is about the gradual erosion of two principles: that women were non-combatant and that the armed forces had a right to be different from society. Non-combatant status governed the number of women who could be recruited, exclusions from key roles, postings to which women were assigned, promotion chances, pay and status. Regulations on married service and pregnancy resulted in women curtailing their period of service. What emerges is the failure of policy-makers and Directors of the women's Services to grapple with societal trends in and attitudes towards marriage and child-bearing, and regulations which made married service problematic. Changing attitudes towards family priorities are revealed also as influencing men's career choices. Rather than a dwindling supply of young men in the late 1980s and early 1990s being the key factor influencing naval personnel policy, this thesis argues that a crisis of retention of experienced men and lack of flexibility in recruitment policy contributed to the decision to open seagoing to women.

The WRNS and the WRAF were selected as the subjects for this thesis because they opened their main combat roles to women in the early 1990s. They also provided an opportunity to examine the importance of differences in organisation. With airwomen integrated into the RAF, the role of the Director WRAF is seen to be at its most influential in the years of transition from the wartime footing to regular service in the late 1940s. In contrast, although her executive role reduced over the period, the Directors of the WRNS remained an authoritative figure.

This thesis has not attempted to address all aspects of women's military service post-war. Developments of women's army employment, where they remained excluded from main combat roles, is beyond the scope of work that could be conducted and included in this research. However, reference is made to army policies where they help to provide a fuller understanding of the issues. Similarly, only limited mention is made of the armed forces' nurses, who are employed in separate organisations, and of women in the reserve forces. While this research addresses moves towards a policy of equality of opportunity, it is confined to gender issues. Inequalities in respect of policies and attitudes towards ethnic minorities, and draconian treatment of homosexuals well after such relationships were legalised in society, are beyond the scope of this research.

The thesis is organised in three parts. Part I examines the introduction of regular service for women following the Second World War. Chapter 1 looks beyond the public justification of lessening the need for men by following debate about peacetime planning within the Air Ministry and the Admiralty. It describes the status to be accorded to regular servicewomen, the key exclusions from service at sea, flying and the use of small arms, and the roles they were to be allowed. Chapter 2 explores roles of female leaders and how they influenced personnel policies for regular service, organisation of the WRNS compared with the WRAF, pay and terms and conditions of service, recruiting, training and career structure.

Part II identifies and accounts for key developments from the 1950s - 1980s. Chapter 3 examines the early years of regular service and failures in meeting policy targets. It seeks to understand how women's Services survived when the need for men was significantly lessened, as signalled by the end of national service. Chapter

4 explores the impact of social legislation of the 1970s through an examination of developments in the RAF. Chapter 5 addresses issues in the Navy over the same period, concentrating on studies conducted into the status and employment of the WRNS. It sets out arguments made against women serving in ships, while also examining exceptions to this principle.

Part III explores interactions between decisions taken to open all flying roles and seagoing in warships, and the consequences for the WRAF and WRNS. Chapter 6 examines studies into the wider employment of servicewomen in the late 1980s and the policy decisions that followed. It shows that, unable to match the RAF's or the army's piecemeal approach to extending women's roles, it was the personnel situation in the Navy that challenged the principle that women should not serve in main combat roles. The implementation and implications of these policy decisions is covered in Chapter 7. It assesses policy targets and how implementation was adversely affected by defence budget cuts following the end of the Cold War. It also traces the impact on organisation, career structures and pay and conditions of service, assessing the extent to which a new principle of equality of opportunity was intended.

Parts I and II of this thesis rely predominantly on archival sources, particularly the National Archive (TNA) and the National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN), the British Library's newspaper collection, and to a lesser extent the RAF Museum, the Imperial War Museum (IWM) and the Parliamentary Archive. TNA holds policy files relevant to this thesis up to the late 1970s and some for the early 1980s. These have been used to trace developments and arguments from the creation of regular service following the war, retention of women's Services through periods of declining strength of the armed forces, the developing problems of retention and recruitment of personnel in the 1970s, and responses to equality legislation. The NMRN holds a valuable collection of files deposited by the Directorate of the Women's Royal Naval Service in the late 1980s. These include planning for regular service, regulations governing the WRNS, records of conferences of women officers, material collected by Commandant Margaret Fletcher for her history of her

Service,⁴⁰ and copies of *The Wren*, the magazine of the Wrens' Association. In addition, it has recordings made as part of an oral history project on the introduction of seagoing for women. In comparison, records of the WRAF are limited. This is perhaps indicative of its weaker identity as a women's Service. However, the RAF Museum holds the papers of the first wartime Director, Air Chief Commandant Jane Trefusis Forbes⁴¹, and material collected by Squadron Leader Beryl Escott in the 1980s for her history of women in the RAF.⁴² The wartime papers provide valuable evidence on the extent of women's integration into the RAF and development of regulations and terms of service. These wartime conditions were the starting point for the construction of women's regular service following the war.

Part III's exploration of policy on seagoing, flying, changes to terms and conditions of service for women and the abandonment of separate designation of the women in the Services, covers developments in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Files tracing the evolution of these policies have not yet been transferred to archives. In addition to open sources for the period, this research has relied on requests to government departments under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act (2000) which came into force in 2005, and interviews with participants in key events.

Government departments' ability to deal with FOI requests varied. The Treasury and Department of Work and Pensions responded promptly to requests for lists of preserved files and equally so with the contents of files of interest. The Office of Manpower Economics, the secretariat to government pay review bodies, destroyed its files for the Armed Forces Pay Review Body for the period in question.⁴³ The main department for this research has been the MOD. A key lesson was not to route all requests through the MOD's FOI cell in Whitehall, but to enquire directly to other departments or to authorities within the armed forces. Thus the Air Historical Branch of the MOD and the Royal Navy's Fleet Information Cell proved to be the

⁴⁰ M. H. Fletcher, *The WRNS: A History of the Women's Royal Naval Service* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989).

⁴¹ Jane Trefusis Forbes' papers are held under her later name Dame Katherine Watson-Watts. On the award of the title 'Dame', she adopted her first name which was Katherine; Watson-Watts was her married name.

⁴² Beryl E. Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue: The Story of Women in the Royal Air Force from 1918 to the Present Day* (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Patrick Stephens, 1989).

⁴³ My subsequent complaint concerning delay in responding to a request for information on record keeping policy was upheld by the Information Commissioner in 2010.

most efficient routes to information. A list of copies of documents and files received in support of this thesis is provided in the bibliography.

The individuals interviewed for this research were predominantly selected on the basis of their insight into policy development and implementation. They covered many angles in the debate. Analysis in this thesis has been based on weighing evidence from these different voices alongside copies of released documents. Interestingly, those involved in the decision to open seagoing to women had clearer recollections than participants in decisions concerning flying policies. As this thesis demonstrates, this reflects the magnitude of the change brought about by seagoing policy compared with flying.

Archival sources have been supplemented by access to papers held privately. Notably, Andrew Peake permitted the use of the documents and letters of his mother, Dame Felicity Peake. As Felicity Hanbury, she served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force throughout the Second World War. She was appointed as Director in 1946 and participated in negotiation of her Service's transition from auxiliary to regular status before retiring in 1950. Other valuable papers have been provided by Captain Caroline Coates (RN), who was a member of the study team that examined the future of the WRNS in 1988-9, and Flight Lieutenant Julie Gibson (RAF) who sought a flying career in the 1980s.

Part I:

Establishing Regular Service for Women in the 1940s

Chapter 1: Creating Regular Service for Women: from Wartime Expediency to Peacetime Foothold

On 30 May 1946, announcing continuing conscription for men, George Isaacs (Minister for Labour and National Service) told the House of Commons that 'In order to lessen the needs of the Services for men ...[it had] also been decided to continue the WRNS, the ATS and the WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] on a voluntary basis as permanent features of the Forces of the Crown.'¹ Commandant Vera Laughton Mathews (Director WRNS, 1939-46) expected 'splash headlines' for what she considered to be a 'revolutionary change', but recollected that 'not a paper gave it a headline'.² Mathews had a point. In introducing peacetime service for women, Britain responded differently from its post-World War I stance when it disbanded women's Services. It also diverged from policies of allied countries. Australia and Canada demobilized their women's Services. The USA, which had fewer servicewomen than Britain, reduced numbers from 266,000 to 14,000 (approximately 1% of its armed forces) by 1948 when its wartime authorisation for women's Services was due to expire.³ While the USA re-enacted the necessary legislation that year and Australia and Canada re-established women's forces in the early 1950s, Britain made its policy decision in 1946, introduced interim arrangements through an extended service scheme and brought in regular force conditions on 1 February 1949.

'Lessening the need for men' was a publicly recognisable justification for women's military service, having been a feature of wartime recruiting.⁴ Politically, it pre-empted potential criticism about women no longer being subject to national service.⁵ Lucy Noakes, coupling the phrase with the concept of women releasing men for

¹ House of Commons Debates [henceforward HC Deb], 5th Ser., Vol. 423, Col.1338, 30 May 1946. The Women's Auxiliary Air Force existed from 1939 to January 1949. 'WRAF', the First World War title, was re-introduced on 1 February 1949 (see below).

² Vera Laughton Mathews, *Blue Tapestry*. (London: Hollis & Carter, 1948), p. 276. Actually, the story made the front page of the *Daily Mail* under a heading 'Plan for Girls', 31 May 1946.

³ The USA's 1948 legislation limited women to 2% of the strength. Martin Binkin and Shirley J Bach, *Women and the Military*, (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1977), pp.10-11. For Canada, see www.forces.gc.ca Newsroom Backgrounder 'Women in the Canadian Forces' (accessed 19 Mar 2009); for Australia, see www.defence.gov.au (accessed 22 Nov 2008).

⁴ For example, 'Free a Man for the Fleet' poster, Imperial War Museum [henceforward IWM]: PST 8286.

⁵ Conscription of women was approved under National Service Act No.2 (1941). Single women were called up from January 1942 (RAF Museum [henceforward RAFM]: AP 3234 The Women's Auxiliary Air Force, 1953).

higher status work, argued that this factor was key to the War Office's support for regular service.⁶ This chapter reveals the struggle to reach a decision on the future of the women's Services in the Air Ministry and the Admiralty. It suggests that, rather than reducing the need for men, some senior men in the Air Ministry and the Admiralty saw servicewomen as implying the loss of an equivalent number of more useful servicemen. Air Marshal Slessor, by making a case for readiness for a future war, emerges as a key figure in swaying opinion at the Air Council against those who argued that women would not represent value for money. Had the RAF been against maintaining a women's component then, arguably, the Royal Navy would not have retained the WRNS.

Examination of the status of the women's Services, exclusion of women from key roles and work that women were to undertake shows also that the Service Ministries took different views on how to shape these new peacetime careers. Policy decisions stemmed from fundamental differences between the environments of air forces and navies, as well as by gender and budget considerations.⁷ They resulted in an integrated, militarized WRAF and a civilian WRNS that remained separate from the Royal Navy. What the Services held in common was exclusion of women from combat roles, a factor that inhibited career prospects.

Wartime Participation

Women's Services were initially formed during the First World War. The WRNS, created in November 1917, supported the Royal Navy in shore-based jobs. By the time it disbanded in 1919, 7,000 women had served in its ranks.⁸ On 1 April 1918, the RAF was created by merging components of the Royal Flying Corps from the army and the Royal Naval Air Service. The WRAF came into being on the same day. Initially, it drew 10,000 women from those already serving in the WRNS or the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. In total, over 32,000 women served in the WRAF between 1918-20.⁹ Like the other women's Services, it was demobilized. In losing

⁶ Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, p.156.

⁷ This point about the employment opportunities in support roles in the air force has been made by Dandeker and Segal, 'Gender Integration in the Armed Forces', p.34.

⁸ Fletcher, *The WRNS*, p.11.

⁹ The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps formed in March 1917 (Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, p.68). It was renamed Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps in April 1918. WRAF statistics from Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue*, p.295.

their jobs after the war, servicewomen shared a fate common to women substituting for men in various jobs.

Women's Services were reconstituted in 1938 and 1939 in anticipation of the outbreak of war.¹⁰ In the WRNS, officers could join 47 branches and ratings 81 'categories' of work over the period 1939-45, compared with 10 and 21 respectively between 1917-19.¹¹ In addition to domestic and clerical work, roles included technical duties at unskilled or semi-skilled levels, operator work for new technologies such as radar, and keyboard work of all descriptions.¹² The Command at Plymouth initiated employment of women as crew for harbour craft. Duties included transferring personnel and mail between the shore and ships at anchor, as well as the maintenance of the boats. This role was favoured in publicity campaigns, although only a small proportion of Wrens were employed as boat crew.¹³ Female officers with degrees in scientific or mathematical disciplines could work on weapons' trials and train submarine crews in torpedo attack.¹⁴ About 26% of officers were employed on cipher duties, maintaining confidential books, and coding and decoding signals. A few served in troop ships crossing the Atlantic, along with female ratings¹⁵ who worked as shorthand typists.¹⁶ In 1944, the WRNS reached its peak of 73,500 women (8.5% of total naval forces' strength).¹⁷

In the WAAF, women could join 23 branches for officers and 93 trades for non-commissioned ranks between 1939-45, compared with 5 and 53 respectively between 1918-20.¹⁸ Airwomen served on operational stations alongside men. Like the WRNS, they were employed in domestic, clerical and operator trades. In engineering, some roles were initially reduced in scope so that women could

¹⁰ For an account of the campaign to re-establish women's Services, see Jeremy Crang, 'The Revival of the British Women's Auxiliary Services in the Late Nineteen-thirties', *Historical Research*, Vol.83, No.220, May 2010, pp.343-357.

¹¹ Fletcher, *The WRNS*, pp.150-1. As in the RAF, work for officers was organised in 'branches'. 'Categories' was used to designate work of non-commissioned ranks, whereas the RAF used the word 'trades'.

¹² TNA: ADM 116/5771, History: General Review of Manning, 30 Jan 1948.

¹³ Mathews, *Blue Tapestry*, p.202 and p.206.

¹⁴ TNA: ADM 234/219, Women's Royal Naval Service 1939-45 (Official History), 1956, pp.76-7.

¹⁵ 'Rating' or 'rate' are generic terms used in the Navy for non-commissioned personnel.

¹⁶ TNA: ADM 234/219, Women's Royal Naval Service 1939-45 (Official History), 1956, p.84.

¹⁷ *Annual Abstract of Statistics 1938-50* (London: HMSO, 1951), Vol.88, Table 125.

¹⁸ Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue*, pp.298-9.

undertake part of the work. However, where they proved their competence, some sub-divisions of trades were dropped and women undertook the full roles. Examples included engine flight mechanics, electricians and instrument repairers.¹⁹

Percentages of allowable substitutes for men were restricted if there were perceived shortcomings in women's ability to sustain long hours or heavy work.²⁰ The WAAF recorded its greatest strength in 1943 as 181,800 (15.7% of total air force strength).²¹

Women served mostly in the United Kingdom. In the WRNS, women under the age of 19 were permitted to serve locally to where they lived. About one-third were serving on these 'immobile' terms in late 1942.²² Airwomen were required to serve where sent.²³ The requirement for female workers at overseas bases was initially met by employing women locally. As the war progressed, servicewomen were posted overseas from the UK. The naval authorities were quicker than the Air Ministry to take this step, sending a first draft of Wrens to Singapore in January 1941.²⁴ Initially voluntary, compulsory liability for overseas drafting was introduced for Wrens aged over 20 in November 1943.²⁵ Although airwomen could be posted to bases overseas, the Director did not press the issue. Such postings were agreed 'when the shortage of manpower in certain trades or branches made it virtually essential.'²⁶ Air Ministry authorities foresaw difficulties such as 'the possible effect of climatic conditions, the concern of parents, ... security, both physical and psychological, the provision of special kit, ... accommodation in troopships, medical arrangements and living conditions.'²⁷ Initially, small numbers of officers were sent to the USA or countries in the Dominions and, from July 1942, to the Middle East. Airwomen enrolled in the UK served overseas only from 1944. Compulsory service abroad was avoided as the

¹⁹ RAFM: AP3234, *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force 1939-1945*, 1953, p.86.

²⁰ Ibid, p.87.

²¹ *Annual Abstract of Statistics 1938-50* (London: HMSO, 1951), Vol.88, Table 125. In support of the army, the ATS also peaked in 1943, reaching 210,300 (7.2% of total army strength).

²² Ursula Stuart Mason, *Britannia's Daughters: the Story of the WRNS* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2011), p.47.

²³ J. Hammerton (ed.), *The Book of the WAAF: a Practical Guide to the Women's Branch of the RAF* (London: Amalgamated Press, 1942), p.8.

²⁴ TNA: ADM 234/219, *Women's Royal Naval Service 1939-45 (Official History)*, 1956, p.66.

²⁵ NMRN: 1988.350.1-5, BR1077 Regulations and Instructions for the WRNS, 1943.

²⁶ RAFM: AP3234, *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force 1939-1945*, 1953, p.105.

²⁷ Ibid.

requirement was met through volunteers. Fewer than 9,000 members of the WAAF served abroad during the war.²⁸

Over the course of the Second World War, the armed forces expanded women's employment in terms of numbers, roles and locations in which women could serve. However, reliance on women's contribution varied. As Table 1.1 shows, numerically, the army depended most on women's employment. In percentage terms, the RAF made greatest use of women. The Navy was least dependent on its women's Service.

Table 1.1 Strength of the Armed Forces 1938-49

At 30 June, except 1938 figure which was 31 March.

Thousands

	1938	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
RN	112.7	405.5	506.7	671.0	790.0	788.8	350.0	189.6	138.6	139.9
WRNS	0	15.1	28.6	53.3	73.5	72.0	20.5	7.4	7.0	6.4
Total	112.7	420.6	535.3	724.3	863.5	860.8	370.5	197.0	145.6	146.3
Women % of Total	0	3.6	5.3	7.4	8.5	8.4	5.5	3.8	4.8	4.4
RAF	69.5	664.6	839.8	972.5	1011.4	962.6	438.5	284.5	222.2	205.1
WAAF/ WRAF	0	37.4	125.7	181.8	174.4	153.0	46.7	22.5	15.5	14.5
Total	69.5	702.0	965.5	1154.3	1185.8	1115.6	485.2	307.0	237.7	219.6
Women % of Total	0	5.3	13.0	15.7	14.7	13.7	9.6	7.3	6.5	6.6
Army	198.8	2221.4	2468.1	2691.8	2742.4	2930.9	1128.9	773.5	447.6	393.8
ATS/ WRAC	0	42.8	140.2	210.3	199.0	190.8	60.1	29.5	14.3	9.0
Total	198.8	2264.2	2608.3	2902.1	2941.4	3121.7	1189.0	803.0	461.9	402.8
Women % of Total	0	1.9	5.4	7.2	6.8	6.1	5.1	3.7	3.1	2.2

Annual Abstract of Statistics, Vol. 88 (1938 – 1950), (London: HMSO, 1951), Table 125.

Policy Development

Assheton Study on the Future of Women's Services

The idea of retaining servicewomen after the war can be traced back to 1942 and Violet Markham's report on amenities and welfare in the women's Services. Going beyond her terms of reference, she suggested women should be employed with the

²⁸ Ibid, p.106.

forces of occupation in Continental Europe. She argued that skills developed during the war could be used in the task of reconstructing liberated or occupied countries. Although she acknowledged that many women would want to return to civilian life, she thought there would be great interest in this outlet for further service.²⁹

Violet Markham's report prompted a further study. It was led by Ralph Assheton, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. In her evidence to his committee, Markham clarified that she had been proposing the 'continued existence of the women's Services up to general demobilization'.³⁰ However, Assheton was given the broader remit of making recommendations on the future of the women's Services, not just the scope for their employment in post-war reconstruction.³¹

The Services' evidence to Assheton was derived from opinions on the importance of women to their future structures and budget implications. The Admiralty wanted to re-establish the pre-war pattern of men's postings which rotated between shore-based jobs in the UK, UK waters or foreign service. Not being allowed to serve at sea, women would mostly fill UK shore jobs. The Admiralty argued that every woman would mean one less man available for ships in an emergency. At most, it might want a small permanently employed nucleus of women to organise and train a larger reserve.³² The War Office declined to say what it wanted in the absence of information on its budget and the number of men it was to be allowed. It thought 'even a nucleus [of women] for further expansion might need to be dropped in favour of other prior claims'.³³ However, if money was available, it wanted a permanent nucleus of women and a reserve.³⁴ The RAF was considered different because women worked alongside men on operational stations. The Air Ministry thought it 'very desirable' to have a regular women's Service, assuming its budget allowed. If money was tight, though, it too would have a nucleus of employed women plus reservists.³⁵

²⁹ *Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare Conditions in the Three Women's Services*, Cmd. 6384, (London: HMSO, 1942), pp.53-5.

³⁰ The National Archive [henceforward TNA]: CAB 66/38, Report of the Committee on the Women's Services, 24 Jun 1943.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Ralph Assheton concluded that all three Services would need to employ women in a future major war. Nobody wanted to contemplate '... the delays and difficulties experienced at the start of the present war, which would be bound to recur if the women's Services had to be started from scratch'.³⁶ However, decisions could only be made in the context of restructuring the armed forces for peace, taking into account budgets.³⁷ Accordingly, in July 1943, Winston Churchill announced in the House of Commons that women's Auxiliary Services would be needed 'for some time after hostilities [had] ceased ... to accompany Forces of Occupation'.³⁸ Work passed to post-war planning committees.

Planning for Post-War

There were competing arguments in the Air Ministry over the future of the WAAF. Those in favour of regular service argued the need to organise in peace on the pattern required in a major war. Women had proved themselves capable of a wide range of duties and were considered better than men in some. Thus, the argument went, there would be an efficiency gain in employing women. Proponents also urged that airwomen would expect the opportunity of regular service. They suggested there was a risk of being unable to recruit sufficient men of the required quality to sustain an Air Force which was to be three times the size of the pre-war force after demobilization (Table 1.1).³⁹

The case against regular servicewomen was also based on wartime evidence. A number of difficulties were emphasised: problems of administration, training and accommodation; high wastage rate through women leaving on marriage; limitations on overseas posting; airwomen not undertaking the full range of work done by men; and the potential for resentment by men of working for women, accepted under war conditions, but a potential source of friction in peace. The difficulty of finding sufficient women for non-commissioned officer (NCO) and officer ranks was a major objection.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ HC Deb, 5th Ser., Vol.391, Col. 1072-1073, 22 Jul 1943.

³⁹ TNA: AIR 2/7824, Committee on Manning the Post-War RAF – Sixth Interim Report, Dec 1944.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Drawing on reports from various RAF Commands, the Air Ministry's evidence to the Royal Commission on Equal Pay (1943-6) cautioned that wartime experience should not be generalised. Women in sedentary jobs were said to benefit from comparisons with men of 'very inferior quality to the male personnel who would be employed in peacetime.'⁴¹ Women were perceived to perform better than men in code and cipher duties, as telephonists, fabric workers, clerks, waitresses and nursing orderlies. However, this work was described as mundane. Men were said to need more stimulating work to show their talents. Compared with men, women were reportedly more prone to sickness and absenteeism, less likely to exercise authority or initiative or to take responsibility.⁴² While men's poor performance was attributed to the intrinsic nature of the job, for women it was their personal failings that were to the fore.

In early 1945, there was strong opposition to retention of airwomen. Air Marshal Sutton, in his final weeks as Air Member for Personnel (AMP), urged colleagues to bear in mind the financial implications of the high turnover of women compared with men. Rather than women lessening the need for men, he feared that employing women would entail the 'loss of the equivalent number of highly trained airmen'.⁴³ The post-war planning committee, chaired by Air Chief Marshal Sir Douglas Evill (Vice Chief of the Air Staff), shared Sutton's views. Emphasising costs, difficulties in obtaining officers and NCOs, the loss of men who would be 'most urgently required as basis for expansion in a future emergency' and potential legal and disciplinary difficulties, it adopted as a planning assumption that there would be no regular WAAF.⁴⁴ Such a force would only conceivably be necessary if it proved impossible to recruit enough men. However, 'this possibility could be disregarded for the time being'.⁴⁵ The committee concluded that a women's reserve force would be needed.⁴⁶

⁴¹ TNA: AIR 14/1009, Sandford to Secretary Royal Commission on Equal Pay, 5 Jun 1945.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ TNA: AIR 2/7824, Future of the WAAF, Note to Air Council, 31 Jan 1945.

⁴⁴ Ibid, Air Council Post War Planning Committee Conclusions, 7 Feb 1945.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Air Marshal Sutton was replaced in March 1945 by Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, a future Chief of Air Staff. Slessor had previously expressed support for regular servicewomen.⁴⁷ He raised doubts about the planning committee's intentions and, in June 1945, he put a paper to the Air Council urging it to re-open the issue. Noting that 'few [would] deny that the WAAF was very largely ineffective during the first year of the war because it had no foundation of experience, organisation or training', he urged that a reserve for women would not be adequate.⁴⁸ A regular component was needed to provide a core of women in appropriate trades around which future mobilization could be built. In addition, regular servicewomen would be needed for administration, organisation and training of reservists. He dismissed financial objections by arguing that, while 'women might not do as much as men and they might cost more than men', that '[was] not the point'.⁴⁹ He elaborated that '... in any future war a substantial proportion of the Service [would] consist of women (which no-one contests)'.⁵⁰ He believed the RAF should be organised in peace 'to prevent war not merely to win it in the 3rd or 4th year'.⁵¹

There was still opposition at the Air Council. Sir Arthur Street (Permanent Under Secretary) questioned value for money on the grounds that women would cost more than twice as much as regular servicemen due to higher turnover. With implications also for the other Services, which he thought were against regular servicewomen, the matter would need to go to the Cabinet. Meanwhile, an extended service scheme should be introduced for women, pending a decision about peacetime service. Slessor was directed to consult Army and Navy opinion on commissioning a study into the long-term need for servicewomen.⁵²

Rather than being opposed to regular servicewomen, the Army Board's thinking was ahead of the Air Ministry's. Like Air Marshal Slessor, the army's post-war planning committee emphasised the need to prepare for future mobilization. By August 1945,

⁴⁷ TNA: AIR 75/47, Note to Air Member for Personnel, 24 Oct 1944.

⁴⁸ TNA: AIR 2/7824, Future of the WAAF, Note for the Air Council, 20 Jun 1945.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² TNA: AIR 6/75, Air Council Conclusions 7(45), 17 Jul 1945.

it wanted 3,000 regular servicewomen and a reserve of 16,000.⁵³ The War Office declined the proposal for a new study because its plans were advanced and it intended seeking approval to employ regular servicewomen.⁵⁴

The Admiralty was reluctant to commit to keeping the WRNS and welcomed the idea of a further study.⁵⁵ At a time of great uncertainty concerning its budget, the number of men it was to be allowed, the value for money of employing Wrens and the potential for the Royal Commission on Equal Pay to increase women's pay, the Board was not ready to make a decision.

In evidence given to the Royal Commission, the Admiralty's assessment of Wrens was expressed in damning terms as being up to 25% less effective than men in most trades and never more than 10% superior where they were deemed to perform better. While the derivation of these percentages was not explained, inferiority was attributed to:

‘lack of physical strength and inability to stand up to prolonged strain, ... inferior mechanical aptitude, lower capacity for the application of knowledge, inclination to get flustered in emergency and more easily discouraged when up against difficulties; lack of capacity for improvisation; unwillingness to accept responsibility and inability to exercise authority.’⁵⁶

Given this judgement, it was not surprising that the Admiralty resisted the continued employment of women although the evidence to the Commission may have been chiefly intended to highlight differences in roles, responsibilities and output to undermine any case for equal pay.⁵⁷

In December 1945, with projected budgets being less than anticipated, the Admiralty Board asked planning staff to look into demobilising the WRNS by 31 March

⁵³ TNA: WO 32/13160, Future of the Women's Services, 11 May 1945 and Provision of a Permanent Regular Women's Service, 11 Aug 1945.

⁵⁴ TNA: AIR 6/75, Air Council Conclusions, 2 Oct 1945.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ TNA: ADM 1/18884, Statement for Royal Commission on Equal Pay, 3 Oct 1945.

⁵⁷ Women were paid less than single men. See Chapter 2.

1947.⁵⁸ However, by March 1946 the personnel department's perception of women's utility was veering away from the stance that they blocked shore appointments towards the idea that they released men for higher value work. Rear Admiral Denny, the Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel, wrote to Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham (First Sea Lord) arguing that there could be advantage in using women in shore-based jobs to avoid men having too much time ashore compared with time at sea.⁵⁹

Deciding on Peacetime Service

Echoing the War Office's plans, Air Marshal Slessor recommended regular service for women in a paper for the Air Council in January 1946.⁶⁰ He made two key points. First, he cautioned against a peacetime organisation which lacked a necessary wartime component, in case the government of the day failed or was unable to give the go ahead to correct the deficiency before a war started. Second, by now Slessor doubted that the RAF could obtain enough men in peacetime for an Air Force expected to be about 300,000 strong. He proposed long service as a means of developing female officers and NCOs. Rather than questioning women's ability to fill more senior ranks, he turned this objection into a reason for employing regular servicewomen. He also saw women continuing to work alongside men as a means of overcoming the potential for prejudice; working with women was to become a 'natural incident of service life'.⁶¹

At the Air Council meeting, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Tedder (Chief of Air Staff from the beginning of 1946) supported Slessor's case. He argued that 'In the event of another war, we might not have a year's grace which we had at the beginning of the last war.'⁶² Also in favour, Lord Henderson argued that 'the public was now attuned to the idea of women in the Services.'⁶³ Sir William Brown (Arthur Street's successor as Permanent under Secretary) raised concern about the financial

⁵⁸ TNA: ADM 167/124, Admiralty Board Minutes, 21 Dec 1945.

⁵⁹ National Museum of the Royal Navy [henceforward NMRN]: 1988.350.57, Permanent Service, 28 Mar 1946.

⁶⁰ TNA: AIR 6/82, Future of the WAAF AC3(46), 11 Jan 1946.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² TNA: AIR 6/76, Air Council Conclusions, 15 Jan 1946.

⁶³ Ibid. Lord Henderson was a government whip in the House of Lords.

implications. He doubted that peacetime service would appeal to women.⁶⁴ His was now a minority view. Slessor's recommendation was agreed.

While the Air Council made its case for a 10,000 strong women's Service to be employed in as wide a range of duties as possible and the War Office wanted to employ 3,000 servicewomen, the Admiralty Board still leaned towards doing without the WRNS.⁶⁵ Albert Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty, thought that it was 'doubtful wisdom to attempt to maintain active Women's Services in peacetime'.⁶⁶ He acknowledged that, if the others retained servicewomen, there would be strong pressure on the Admiralty to adopt the same policy. However, he believed the Cabinet would reject the idea.⁶⁷ He complained about the pressure to make a decision before the outcome of the Royal Commission on Equal Pay was known. However, a rough estimate provided for the Board suggested that, even if equal pay was introduced, women would still be marginally cheaper to employ than men due primarily to women's lesser entitlement to allowances.⁶⁸

In March 1946, General Lord Ismay (Ministry of Defence) advised Clement Attlee that a decision on the women's Services was urgently needed. With the War Office and the Air Ministry ready to proceed, Ismay informed Attlee that they had been 'unable to get the Admiralty to make up their minds'.⁶⁹ He asked the Prime Minister to put pressure on the Admiralty through the Defence Committee.⁷⁰

Action through the Defence Committee brought matters to a head. However, Albert Alexander remained reluctant to keep the WRNS. He made the point to Sir Henry Markham (Permanent under Secretary) that the Royal Navy was the smallest of the Services and money was limited. He added that Wrens were not as productive as men and attracted additional costs for women's accommodation. He argued that the Admiralty 'should not be too ready to follow the other Services in this matter'.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ TNA: WO 32/13160, Appendix A to PICB/P(46)3, 1 Apr 1946. The figure included in the final paper for the Cabinet was 8,000, Cabinet Paper DO(46)63, 8 May 1946.

⁶⁶ TNA: ADM 167/127, Minute by Mr Alexander, 4 Mar 1946.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, Minute by Mr Dunn, 7 Mar 1946.

⁶⁹ TNA: PREM 8/835, Ismay to Prime Minister, 26 Mar 1946.

⁷⁰ Ibid and CAB 131/1, Cabinet Defence Committee Conclusions, 27 Mar 1946.

⁷¹ TNA: ADM 116/5725, Signal, First Lord to Markham, 17 Apr 1946.

In Albert Alexander's absence in India, the Board discussed the issues. It agreed that a reserve, without a regular component, would not provide the basis for expansion in a future war. It recommended to Alexander that the Navy should keep the WRNS, with a permanent nucleus of up to 5,000 women and a reserve. The Board suggested that Wrens be employed in work requiring only short periods of training and for which they were better suited than men. Noting the lack of information on costs, the proposal was subject to further work to confirm that women would not be more expensive to employ than men.⁷² Although not fully convinced, Alexander conceded.⁷³ The Admiralty put its name, alongside the War Office and the Air Ministry, to the proposal to create regular service for women.⁷⁴

Albert Alexander's opinion that the idea would be rejected at Cabinet was ill-founded. As Lucy Noakes observed, the Defence Committee was more concerned with the issue of the peacetime conscription of young men. The minutes recorded a desire for servicewomen to be trained in roles such as typing, book-keeping and domestic trades which the Committee deemed would be useful when the women returned to civilian life. It concluded that 'Subject to consultation with the Treasury, [the Services' Ministries could] recruit as many women as could usefully be employed in substitution for men.'⁷⁵

Status, Titles and Ranks

Status of Women's Services

Early in the war, discipline in the women's Services had no legal basis. The acceptance of punishment was described as dependent on the 'good will' of the offender.⁷⁶ Not under military law, women could not be held in the Services or charged with desertion. A meeting in May 1940 recorded that 10% of ATS women left in the first five months of the year. The WAAF reported a loss of 27% of its recruits from the previous nine months. It was difficult to distinguish how many

⁷² Ibid, Signal, Markham to First Lord, 17 Apr 1946 and ADM 167/126, Board Minutes, 17 Apr 1946.

⁷³ TNA: ADM 116/5725, Signal, First Lord to Markham, 29 Apr 1946.

⁷⁴ TNA: CAB 131/2, Organisation of the Women's Services in Peace, 8 May 1946.

⁷⁵ TNA: CAB 131/1, Cabinet Defence Committee Conclusions, 17 May 1946.

⁷⁶ RAFM: AP3234, *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force 1939-1945*, 1953, p.19 and Roy Terry, *Women in Khaki*, p.118.

women deserted as many cases were just recorded as 'compassionate discharge'.⁷⁷ Statistics were not given for the WRNS. However, the Official History produced in 1956 quoted the discharge of 6.3% of WRNS personnel for the period December 1940 to March 1941. Thirty-seven women were recorded as deserting, 164 left on compassionate grounds, 112 at their own request and 285 were discharged during a two-week probationary period for WRNS recruits.⁷⁸

In September 1940, the Cabinet Home Policy Committee directed that the application of military law to servicewomen be further considered.⁷⁹ Air Commandant Trefusis Forbes (Director WAAF) was keen to put women on a more equal footing with servicemen by bringing them under the Air Force Act.⁸⁰ Helen Gwynne-Vaughan (Director ATS) wrote in her wartime memoir that her 'own hopes came to be centred increasingly on this question because I realized to how many others it was fundamental. So often the fact that we were civilian blocked some avenue of usefulness ...'.⁸¹ Like her counterparts, Commandant Mathews wanted the Naval Discipline Act (NDA) to apply to women. She argued that women replaced men and worked alongside men who came under military law. Second, men and women committing an offence jointly were subject to different procedures. Third, some women were engaged in secret work and work verging on combatant. Fourth, numbers were vastly greater than originally envisaged and so greater disciplinary powers were needed. She went on to say that conscripting women would result in recruitment 'from all classes' and so 'the same standard of good behaviour [could] not be relied upon'.⁸² For these reasons, and as a boost to efficiency and morale, she argued that women should be brought under the NDA.⁸³

In 1941, the War Office led on the issue of military status for women. It argued that military law would be good for prestige, recruiting and discipline. More importantly, it intended employing women in anti-aircraft artillery roles which it described as

⁷⁷ TNA: ADM 116/5102, Meeting with Judge Advocate General, 23 May 1940.

⁷⁸ TNA: ADM 234/219, Women's Royal Naval Service 1939-45 (Official History), 1956, p.41.

⁷⁹ RAFM: AP3234, *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force 1939-1945*, Air Historical Branch 1953, p.18.

⁸⁰ RAFM: AC 72/17 Box 4, WAAF Report, 10 April 1940 – 30 June 1940, Section 12.

⁸¹ Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service with the Army*, (London: Hutchinson, 1942), p.135.

⁸² TNA: ADM 116/5102, Disciplinary Status of the WRNS, 8 Apr 1941.

⁸³ Ibid.

'practically combatant duties'.⁸⁴ It took the matter to the War Cabinet where it was supported by the Air Ministry.⁸⁵ However, the Admiralty was reluctant to keep pace. Sir Henry Markham (Permanent under Secretary at the Admiralty) wrote that 'the idea of extending their Lordships' commission to WRNS officers [was] distasteful.'⁸⁶ The Admiralty 'doubted the need for the changes for the WRNS'.⁸⁷ The War Cabinet agreed that the War Office and the Air Ministry could proceed without the Admiralty.⁸⁸ Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations for the ATS and the WAAF came into effect on 25 April 1941, making these Services 'part of the Armed Forces of the Crown'.⁸⁹ Women now came under the Army Act or the Air Force Act 'to such extent and subject to such adaptations and modifications' as deemed necessary by the Army Council or Air Council.⁹⁰ Officers were granted the King's commission.⁹¹ These new regulations did not apply to the WRNS. Wrens were not brought under the Naval Discipline Act and, in law, remained civilians.

Commandant Mathews continued to battle within the Admiralty, now spurred on by the difference in standing between her Service and the others.⁹² However, all but one of the Commanders-in Chief consulted on the issue in 1941 opposed the introduction of the NDA.⁹³ The Admiralty considered the WRNS to be the best of the women's Services and that it therefore had no need of military law to maintain its discipline. It argued that standards of behaviour would not be jeopardized by conscription.⁹⁴ This claim could simply have been reluctance to accord military status to the WRNS, described in a positive manner. The Head of Naval Law asserted that male officers did not want to be put in a position of hearing charges against Wrens.⁹⁵ Women's

⁸⁴ Ibid, McKean (War Office), Women's Services - Memorandum on the Question of Military Status, 19 Feb 1941.

⁸⁵ Ibid, War Cabinet Conclusions 33(41), 31 Mar 1941.

⁸⁶ Ibid, Note by HVM, 15 Mar 1941.

⁸⁷ Ibid, War Cabinet Conclusions 33(41), 31 Mar 1941.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ RAFM: AP3234, *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force 1939-1945*, 1953, p.19.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.19 and Appendix 1.

⁹¹ Ibid, Appendix 1.

⁹² TNA: ADM 234/219, Women's Royal Naval Service 1939-45 (Official History), 1956, p.41.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 40.

⁹⁴ TNA: ADM 234/219, Women's Royal Naval Service 1939-45 (Official History), 1956, p. 38. The WRNS did not require conscripts, recruiting sufficient volunteers (TNA: ADM 116/5771, War Manning General Review, Section XXIX, Jan 1948). Of a total of 217,249 women who served in the WAAF between 1939 and 1945, 33,932 were conscripted (RAFM: AP3234, *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force 1939-1945*, 1953, p.63).

⁹⁵ TNA: ADM 234/219, Women's Royal Naval Service 1939-45 (Official History), 1956, p.43.

discipline was to be left to the senior women to administer; the NDA would have brought it into the purview of male officers.

Mathews tried again in 1942 without support. In 1944 she added new considerations, the most important of which were the spectre of mass desertion as husbands returned from overseas and the difficulty of controlling demobilization without the threat of charges under military law.⁹⁶ She blamed naval husbands for inciting desertion.⁹⁷ She now had support from some major UK Commands which were likewise concerned about desertion.⁹⁸ However, the Admiralty still regarded the NDA unnecessary, that it probably would not solve the problems Mathews raised and it would create a lot of paperwork.⁹⁹

Having made its official case against the NDA on the basis of good discipline, the Admiralty was subsequently constrained to maintain that position. A change of policy could have led to questions as to whether morale and discipline had deteriorated. The formation of the peacetime service, though, provided an opportunity de-coupled from such questions. In 1946, Mr Samuel (Head of Naval Law) favoured its introduction, not because the WRNS could not continue to be run as before, but on the grounds that it would be 'the correct status for a body which [was] an integral part of the Navy'.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the Admiralty Board declined this legal advice. Again it cited the standing of the WRNS in public opinion as the best of the women's Services. It argued that, with the smaller number of women required in peacetime, it would be able to select the best volunteers. As a consequence, good discipline did not require the safeguard of law.¹⁰¹

While this reasoning became the official explanation, there were other considerations. First, the NDA was thought to be harsh compared to the Air Force Act and the Army Act because it was written with the maintenance of discipline at

⁹⁶ TNA: ADM 116/5102, Minute by D WRNS, 27 Jan 1944.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, Commander-in-Chief The Nore (13 Mar 1944). His letter was supported by: Commander-in-Chief Rosyth (13 Mar 1944), Islands Command (7 Apr 1944), Dover (16 Apr 1944) and Naval Air Stations (1 May 1944). Plymouth (3 Apr 1944), Portsmouth (9 Apr 1944) and Western Approaches (29 Apr 1944) opposed introducing the NDA.

⁹⁹ Ibid, Minute by Second Sea Lord, 6 Jun 1944.

¹⁰⁰ NMRN: 1988.350.57, Permanent Service, Head of Naval Law to DWRNS, 12 Jun 1946.

¹⁰¹ TNA: ADM 167/127, Admiralty Board - Disciplinary Status of the WRNS, 26 Sep 1946.

sea as its essence. As women were not to serve at sea, much of it would not be applicable. Second, it was suggested that Wrens might leave the Service rather than accept this more stringent disciplinary code. Third, it was assumed that, if a Wren was subject to a court martial, then a WRNS officer would have to be appointed as a member of the court.¹⁰² This was the advice of Mr Samuel who thought it would be 'unacceptable' for the court to be 'composed entirely of men' and that there would be 'repercussions from the public' if that were the case.¹⁰³ At the time, only executive branch officers (seamen officers) could serve on courts martial. The Admiralty Board was concerned that opening this function to female officers would set a precedent for non-executive branch male officers, a view shared by Mr Samuel.¹⁰⁴ It would seem that the Board was intent on preserving the elite standing of seamen officers.

The Admiralty disliked the powers of command that the RAF intended giving its regular service female officers and NCOs. For the RAF, women were to be regarded as equal members of the Service except in respect of combat roles. Women were to join the RAF, not a separate women's Service or Corps. Officers would hold the King's commission which required them to 'exercise and well discipline in their Duties such Officers, Airmen and Airwomen as may be placed under [their] orders' and instructed subordinates 'to Obey [the officer] as their superior'.¹⁰⁵ The outward symbol of this authority was that commissioned officers were saluted by lower ranks. However, for the Admiralty Board, compulsory saluting of female officers by lower-ranked men was anathema. It preferred that the practice 'should be governed by courtesy and not prescribed by regulation.'¹⁰⁶ Deploing the widening gap between the Navy and the other two services, the Board lamented that it could not stop them from taking this step.¹⁰⁷ WRNS officers were to be given a 'Board commission', which required them to obey orders from their superiors, but did not grant powers of command.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ NMRN: 1988.350.57, Permanent Service, Head of Naval Law to DWRNS, 12 Jun 1946.

¹⁰⁴ TNA: ADM 167/127, Admiralty Board - Disciplinary Status of the WRNS, 26 Sep 1946 and NMRN: 1988.350.57, Head of Naval Law to DWRNS, 12 Jun 1946.

¹⁰⁵ TNA: AIR 30/281, King's Order, 10 Jan 1949.

¹⁰⁶ TNA: ADM 167/129, Admiralty Board Minutes, 2 Jun 1947.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ This should not be taken to mean that men of lower rank did not work for female superiors; they did so by virtue of an Admiralty Fleet Order. Mathews, pp.132-3.

WRNS officers felt keenly the distinctly lower status conferred on them compared with their counterparts. Commandant Woollcombe (successor to Mathews in 1946) urged her officers to accept the decision loyally, saying that '... the Service must do its best to fill the place allotted to it.'¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the issue of status would not die away, not least because of the goading of Wrens by other servicewomen that they were 'mere civilians'.¹¹⁰ According to Admiral Sir Robert Burnett, Commander-in-Chief Plymouth, this description was commonly used in the press and by the public. He thought the Wrens' apparently lower status compared to army and RAF women contributed to the increase in desertion being experienced. 'Parents and prospective employers, husbands and sweethearts' had an impression that service in the WRNS was like 'any other civilian job which may be terminated at the best by a week's notice, at the worst by downing tools, and walking out.'¹¹¹ He did not urge reversing the NDA decision, which he described as being 'intended as a compliment, and loyally understood and accepted as such by the Service'.¹¹² Rather, he suggested the need to describe the WRNS as part of the Royal Navy.¹¹³ Mr Samuel ascribed taunting of Wrens by other servicewomen to 'feelings akin to an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the WRNS'.¹¹⁴ Taking up Admiral Burnett's suggestion, he proposed that the WRNS be described as 'part of the permanent organisation of the Royal Navy' in place of its weaker description as 'an integral part of the naval organisation'.¹¹⁵ The Admiralty Board accepted his advice.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, not coming under military law, Wrens remained a uniformed corps of civilians.

Regular Services' Titles

The women's Services were created as reserve formations before the outbreak of war and two of them used 'auxiliary' in their titles. The term, along with 'territorial' used in the army, was commonly applied to reserve formations, trained as units and available for service in the event of war. Thus, its application to companies in the ATS and the WAAF was in keeping with standard practice. In 1941, the word

¹⁰⁹ NMRN: 1988.350.28.1-4, Minutes of Conference, 18 Jul 1947.

¹¹⁰ TNA: ADM 1/21217, Head of Naval Law to Second Sea Lord, 1 Oct 1948.

¹¹¹ Ibid, Commander-in-Chief Plymouth to Secretary of the Admiralty, 23 Sep 1948.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, Mr Samuel to Second Sea Lord, 1 Oct 1948.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ TNA: ADM 167/132, Admiralty Board Minutes, 1 Feb 1949.

'auxiliary' was adopted in the army as the feminine of 'soldier', to refer to non-commissioned members of the ATS.¹¹⁷

'Auxiliary' proved to be a problematic term for those setting up regular service for women in the RAF and the army. The Admiralty had no issue to address as there was nothing in the title 'Women's Royal Naval Service' that caused difficulty. Retaining it was seen to have the advantage of continuity with its successful wartime predecessor.¹¹⁸ However, 'Auxiliary Territorial Service' and 'Women's Auxiliary Air Force' would not be accurate titles in the military sense of the word 'auxiliary'. Nevertheless, Clement Attlee favoured retention of these existing titles which had 'gathered ... a great amount of goodwill and honour.'¹¹⁹ While he acknowledged that use of 'auxiliary' would be militarily incorrect, he did not regard that as a conclusive reason for change.¹²⁰

Use of the term 'auxiliary' was problematic in a general sense as well as in military language. When applied to servicewomen, it came to be seen as indicating their lower status compared with that of servicemen. For example, Ben Parkin (Labour MP for Stroud who served as an RAF officer during the war) urged that 'auxiliary' be dropped from the title to be adopted in the post-war service for airwomen. He described it as having an 'honourable connotation' but 'a relic of the time when [women] were brought in as odd drivers, orderlies or generally decorative adjuncts to an office.'¹²¹

This interpretation of 'auxiliary' as signifying women's lower military status has become common usage in scholarly works where it has been linked to women being non-combatants. For example, Gerard DeGroot described servicewomen as 'marginalized as auxiliaries, in order to emphasize the difference between combatants and non-combatants.'¹²² Jutta Schwarzkopf suggested that 'the

¹¹⁷ Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service with the Army*, p.137.

¹¹⁸ TNA: ADM 1/20316, Titles of the Women's Services, 6 Mar 1947.

¹¹⁹ TNA: ADM 1/20316, Prime Minister's Personal Minute, 4 Nov 1946.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ HC Deb, 5th Ser., Vol.435, Col.98, 17 Mar 1947. Parkin was speaking during the Air Estimates debate.

¹²² Gerard J. DeGroot, 'Introduction: Arms and the Woman', in Gerard J. DeGroot and Corinna Peniston-Bird (eds.), *A Soldier and a Woman: Sexual Integration in the Military* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p14.

designation "auxiliary" unequivocally signall[ed] women's subordinate status in the military' and that women were 'confined to "auxiliary" functions, defined by their exclusion from combat.'¹²³ However, military use of the word did not necessarily imply 'non-combatant'. For example, at the outbreak of World War II, the men's Auxiliary Air Force contributed twenty flying squadrons and forty-four barrage balloon squadrons.¹²⁴

Despite Clement Attlee's sentimental attachment to the wartime titles, the Air Ministry and the War Office were determined to adopt new ones. The argument rumbled on until 1948. The Air Council believed that the title should reflect women's integration into the Service. Consideration was given to designating women as 'RAF' with a signifier of gender such as RAF(W) or RAF(Women's Division), similar to the means of identifying the men's ground combat component, namely the RAF Regiment.¹²⁵ Albert Alexander (Minister for Defence, formerly at the Admiralty) made the case for new titles to Clement Attlee in January 1948. He suggested 'RAF (Women's Section)' and either 'Royal Army Women's Corps' or 'Royal Army Women's Service'.¹²⁶ He argued that airwomen would be 'fully integrated with the RAF proper' and, therefore, would 'not be in any sense auxiliary'.¹²⁷ On the use of 'ATS' for army women, he noted that women would be neither 'auxiliary' nor 'territorial'.¹²⁸ Attlee finally gave way to the need for changes of titles 'with some reluctance'.¹²⁹

The problem of what new titles were acceptable was the subject of more discussion. 'Women's Royal Army Corps' was chosen, apparently being the preference of the Royal family.¹³⁰ The Air Ministry's proposal of RAF(W) was perceived as unappealing. Clement Attlee favoured 'Women's Royal Air Service'.¹³¹ However, Lord Tedder (Chief of the Air Staff) and Sir James Barnes (Permanent under

¹²³ Schwarzkopf, 'Combatant or Non-Combatant?', p.106.

¹²⁴ An Auxiliary Air Force pilot was credited with being the first to shoot down a German bomber over Britain on 16 October 1939. J. Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF: Handbook for all Branches of the RAF* (London: Amalgamated Press, 1943 edition), pp.60-1.

¹²⁵ TNA: AIR 6/76, Air Council Meetings 6/47, 15 May 1947 and 10/47, 24 Jul 1947.

¹²⁶ TNA: PREM 8/835, Alexander to Attlee, 19 Jan 1948.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid, handwritten note by Clement Attlee, 20 Jan 1948.

¹³⁰ TNA: PREM 8/835, Alexander to Attlee, 24 Jan 1948.

¹³¹ Ibid, handwritten note by Clement Attlee, 10 Feb 1948.

Secretary at the Air Ministry) 'attach[ed] the greatest importance to embodying the words "Royal Air Force" in any proposed title' as those for the other women's Services embodied 'Royal Navy' and 'army'.¹³² The Air Council preferred '... "Women of the Royal Air Force" as the accurate and logical title' but was prepared to compromise by reverting to the First World War designation of 'Women's Royal Air Force'.¹³³ Royal assent was given in December 1948. The new titles came into use on 1 February 1949.¹³⁴

Ranks and Uniform Markings

Status within military hierarchies was immediately evident through rank titles and the braids and badges worn on uniforms. Non-commissioned women's ranks in wartime Services had mainly conformed to titles used in equivalent men's Services. However, officers' ranks were different and this caused confusion because the standing of women's titles was not well understood. Mary Tyrwhitt, Director of the ATS from May 1946, was particularly keen to address the issue because 'The Army used to pretend they didn't know what our ranks meant and they called us "Miss" and refused to use our titles.'¹³⁵ In 1949 she succeeded in arguing for the same titles as male officers.¹³⁶

In 1948, the Air Council decided to change the least understood titles of 'assistant section officer' and 'section officer' which were used for the most junior female officers. It replaced them with 'pilot officer' and 'flying officer', the same as ranks in use for men. However, it chose to retain other officer rank titles as they were deemed sufficiently close to those of men's to be understood (for example, wing officer rather than wing commander). In addition, women at those ranks were more likely to be employed in women's administration rather than in posts also open to men. Thus, the Air Council thought there was no need to make further changes.¹³⁷

¹³² Ibid, Note to Prime Minister, 10 Feb 1948.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ TNA: AIR 30/280, King's Orders 1948, 18 Dec 1948.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Roy Terry, *Women in Khaki*, p.173.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.174.

¹³⁷ TNA: AIR 6/77, Air Council Conclusions, 2 Sep 1948 and AIR 6/87, Air Council Paper - Rank Titles for Women Officers, 20 Jan 1950.

With the War Office ready to make its formal submission on identical rank titles for female officers to the King in early 1950, the Service Ministers' Committee asked the Air Council to reconsider.¹³⁸ Senior RAF members remained against the idea on the grounds that 'the Service in general [might regard] it as being a little ridiculous for male rank titles to be applied to women officers.'¹³⁹ Air Chief Marshal Sir John Slessor, now Chief of the Air Staff, thought men might resent the move. Discussion also revealed a wider anxiety. Air Chief Marshal Sir George Pirie and Air Marshal Sir Victor Goddard thought RAF rank titles inappropriate for all ground-based officers, male or female. Titles created in 1918 reflected the fact that then nearly all officers flew aeroplanes or commanded formations of aeroplanes. The continuation of wartime specialist ground-based roles such as RAF Regiment, secretarial and accounting, equipment, catering and technical, left the anomaly of non-aircrew men also holding ranks suggestive of flying duties. Addressing the question of rank titles of ground-based officers was deemed too contentious. The Air Council shelved the issue.¹⁴⁰ Arthur Henderson, Secretary of State, was unwilling to override RAF members of the Council but lamented that the Service, which he regarded as pioneering the integration of women, was now to lag behind the army.¹⁴¹

Rather disparagingly, Air Marshal Sir Leslie Hollinghurst (Air Member for Personnel) described the Navy as having 'contracted out as usual.'¹⁴² It did not come under pressure to change rank titles because the Service Ministers' Committee agreed it was in a 'special position, since they were a civilian service.'¹⁴³ Commandant Woollcombe did not press the case. Despite her colourful description of WRNS' officer ranks as 'rather an unhappy blend of the Merchant Navy, the Railway and the Asylum', she thought it 'undesirable and sometimes inconvenient that men and women Officers should bear the same rank titles.'¹⁴⁴ She was against any change and there the matter rested.

¹³⁸ TNA: AIR 6/79, Air Council Conclusions, 26 Jan 50.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Remaining WRAF rank titles were made the same as men's in 1968 (TNA: AIR 6/160, Air Council Conclusions, 22 Jan 1968).

¹⁴¹ TNA: AIR 6/79, Air Council Conclusions, 26 Jan 50.

¹⁴² TNA: AIR 6/87, Air Council Paper - Rank Titles for Women Officers, 20 Jan 1950.

¹⁴³ TNA: AIR 6/79, Air Council Conclusions, 26 Jan 50.

¹⁴⁴ TNA: ADM 116/5579, Minute by Director WRNS, 30 Jan 1947.

The Navy also maintained distinctive markings on men and women's uniforms. The pattern was established during the First World War when the Treasury 'forbade the WRNS to wear gold lace, because of the wasting of gold.'¹⁴⁵ Blue lace was chosen instead. In addition, the so-called 'executive curl' on male officers' sleeves was replaced with a diamond (Figures 1.1a and 1.1b). This gave Wrens a strong sense of identity as a distinctive Service. The WAAF, and from 1949 the WRAF, used the same badges and rank insignia as male counterparts (Figures 1.2a to 1.2c).



Figure 1.1a Rank Marking and Cap - RN Lieutenant



Figure 1.1b Rank Marking and Cap - WRNS Second Officer

¹⁴⁵ NMRN: 2007.15.9, *The Wren*, No.319, Feb 94, Commandant Anne Spencer quoting Dame Katherine Furse, Director WRNS in the First World War.



Figure 1.2a Men and Women's Non-Commissioned Ranks' Cap Badge - RAF



Figure 1.2b Rank Marking and Cap - RAF Flight Lieutenant



Figure 1.2c Rank Marking and Cap - WRAF Flight Officer

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 from Colour Supplement to J. Hammerton (ed.), *The Book of the WAAF*.

Exclusion from Essential Functions

The extent of women's participation in the armed forces was governed by their relationship to combat. Were women combatants? Could they be employed in combat roles? What constituted a combat role? 'Combatant' and 'combat role' were not defined but were open to interpretation.

Status as Non-Combatants

From the outset of the Second World War, servicewomen were regarded as non-combatants. This was explicit in the 1938 Royal Warrant which founded the ATS and its RAF companies.¹⁴⁶ The WRNS was also formed for non-combatant work. Although the ATS and the WAAF were declared as part of the armed forces in April 1941, this change did not necessarily imply that women were combatants.

The meaning of non-combatant blurred as the war progressed. The Amendment to the National Service Act (1941) allowed women to use lethal weapons if they agreed in writing.¹⁴⁷ In March 1942, the Air Council clarified that women would 'not be trained in the use of firearms or other lethal weapons, or be employed in any trade which involv[ed] combatant duties.'¹⁴⁸ Acknowledging that there was 'no absolute distinction between combatant duties and non-combatant', the Council decreed that airwomen would not be employed as 'PAC [parachute and cable] operators, armoured car crew, motor-boat crew and ground gunner'.¹⁴⁹ It did allow women to volunteer for what it called 'borderline trades' which included balloon operators, torpedo-men (sic) and armourers.¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile Wrens were trained to use Lewis guns on harbour craft and attached booby traps to balloon cables.¹⁵¹ Servicewomen also went into occupied Europe for the Special Operations Executive.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ Freedom of Information [henceforward FOI] Fleet: Employment of Women in Combat, Brief for Minister for the Armed Forces, 1 Dec 1989.

¹⁴⁷ FOI Fleet: Employment of Women in Combat, Brief for Minister for the Armed Forces, 1 Dec 1989.

¹⁴⁸ Private Papers of Dame Felicity Peake [henceforward Peake Papers]: Box 1, Air Ministry letter, 16 Mar 1942.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, Air Ministry letter, 16 Mar 1942. 'Parachute and cable' was a rocket system which deployed a cable suspended from a parachute. Its purpose was to entangle and, so bring down, an attacking aircraft. It is not obvious why Balloon Squadron work was acceptable but PAC was not, other than perhaps handling rockets. The Admiralty took a different view on similar work. See footnote 151.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ 'Boom defence' Wrens attached booby traps to cables. Examples included bottles of liquid nitrogen or incendiary devices being attached to balloons which were then released to float to the Continent. NRNM: 1991.24.1-75, 24/91 (48), recollections of Mrs Cowans, 24/91 (68), Mrs Beck,

The extent of liability to participate in combat was also problematic for airmen employed in ground-based trades. From 1937 to June 1940, most airmen trained only to drill with weapons, not to fire them. With the threat of invasion, airmen were then expected to use small arms to supplement army detachments which guarded airfields. Following the fall of Crete, where there was a failure to defend a key airfield, defence of RAF bases transferred from the Army to the RAF. The RAF Regiment, akin to an army regiment, was created for this purpose and other airmen continued in support of the task. Post-war, training all airmen in ground combat proved contentious because of the cost of ammunition and diversion of men from their normal duty. This was particularly of concern in highly skilled trades, such as engineering, where the priority was to employ men in their primary role. A policy of 2 hours training per week, introduced in 1946, was not sustained. It was replaced by a policy of up to 48 hours training per annum in 1951.¹⁵³

In 1941, Air Commandant Trefusis Forbes wanted airwomen to be trained to use firearms as part of the wartime initiative to provide more defence forces for airfields.¹⁵⁴ She claimed that the other female Directors were against the idea of women using lethal weapons because they perceived a psychological difference between ‘women having immediate responsibility for the killing of men and being indirectly responsible’.¹⁵⁵ She believed that they thought ‘it would be detrimental to the “womanliness of women” to be actually responsible’.¹⁵⁶ However, she asserted that airwomen were bright enough to realise that the distinction between direct and indirect killing was ‘not worth considering’.¹⁵⁷ Whether or not this was an accurate reflection of Commandant Mathews' view in 1941, by 1943 she was in favour. Arguing her case that women should come under the Naval Discipline Act, she

and 1991.24.76-136, 24/91(79), Mrs Porter. Accounts were collected in 1987 in support of Fletcher, *The WRNS*.

¹⁵² M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in France: an Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France 1940 - 1944* (London: Frank Cass Publishers Whitehall History Publishing, 2004 edition), pp.47-8 and pp.415-7.

¹⁵³ TNA: AIR 20/6531, Future of the RAF Regiment, 1 Dec 1945 and AIR 6/80, Air Council Conclusions, Apr 1951.

¹⁵⁴ TNA: AIR 24/1645, Minute to AMP, Appendix 10 to Operations Record Book, 24 Nov 1941.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

pointed out that the Admiralty Board had approved the training of some Wrens in the use of guns.¹⁵⁸

Discussion of weapons training for servicewomen arose post-war in the War Office where there was some strong support. However, the idea does not appear to have been formally considered by the Army Board and it did not become policy.¹⁵⁹

Opponents of the proposal cited cost of training, expenditure of ammunition, assumed adverse public opinion, parental objections which might have an impact on recruiting, and the views of servicewomen who had joined without this obligation.¹⁶⁰ Examples of communist countries' employment of women as fighters were also used as a reason against Britain adopting such a policy.¹⁶¹ Lucy Noakes' detailed analysis concluded that 'Even when women wore an army uniform their gendered identity took precedence ...' and that the creation of regular service reinforced the combat taboo.¹⁶²

Major General McCandlish, who led on this policy, speculated that the Navy would regard the WRNS as 'non-combatant shore-based employees' while the RAF might train women for defensive duties as part of its philosophy of integrating women into the Service.¹⁶³ However, at a meeting to discuss War Office proposals the reverse positions were taken by Navy and RAF representatives. Mr Bird, whose status and department were not noted, and Commandant Woollcombe attended on behalf of the Admiralty. Mr Bird reported that no action had been taken in the Admiralty, but that it was probable that compulsory training for defensive purposes would be introduced.¹⁶⁴ This seems a doubtful representation of the Admiralty's position, as the Board had already decided (as Major General McCandlish indicated) that Wrens would retain civilian status. The Air Ministry, represented by Group Captain Jackman from the Directorate of Personnel Services, said the question had not yet

¹⁵⁸ TNA: ADM 167/118, WRNS Disciplinary Status, 10 Feb 1943.

¹⁵⁹ FOI Fleet: Employment of Women in Combat, Brief for Minister for the Armed Forces, 1 Dec 1989.

¹⁶⁰ TNA: WO 32/13173, Minute 3, circa Nov 1948; WO 32/13689, Draft Paper for Army Board, 14 May 1949, DSD Minute, 14 Jun 49, Revised Paper, 18 Jul 1949.

¹⁶¹ TNA: AIR 19/742, minute to PUS from AUS(G), 28 May 1947 and WO 32/13689 Minute by DSD to DPA, 14 Jun 1949. For a full treatment of the army position see Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, pp.149-52.

¹⁶² Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, p.150 and p.152.

¹⁶³ TNA: WO 32/13173, Minute to Brigadier AG Co-ord, 28 May 1948.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, Minutes of Meeting on Defensive Role of WRAC in War, 8 Nov 1948.

been considered. He could not say what future policy might be but that the 'Air Ministry had no intention of introducing compulsory weapon training for the WRAF at present.'¹⁶⁵ This reflected the position of the previous Secretary of State, Philip Noel-Baker. In a letter in 1947 to his War Office counterpart, he recorded his view that he hoped women would never have combatant status.¹⁶⁶ In the event, the initiative stalled in the War Office. All servicewomen were deemed non-combatants although this was known at the time not to be their position in law.¹⁶⁷ The exclusion of airwomen from training in the use of firearms was subsequently embodied in the Queen's Regulations for the RAF.¹⁶⁸

Seagoing and Flying

In 1943, in reply to a question in the House of Commons during the naval estimates debate, Captain Pilkington (Civil Lord of the Admiralty) said that '... the principle of WRNS serving afloat [was] not objected to by the Admiralty ... But the real difficulty about this proposal [was] accommodation on board.' He went on: '... if, when and where it [was] found practicable to employ Wrens afloat that [would] certainly be done.'¹⁶⁹ Such professed optimism about the role that women could play was absent from the 1946 policy proposal for regular Service. Without equivocation it declared that 'it [was] not, of course, intended to employ WRNS on board ship.'¹⁷⁰

As the RAF did not permit women to fly during the war, female pilots joined the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) which was part of the Ministry of Aircraft Production. In 1943, when the Admiralty suggested introducing WRNS' pilots for limited flying roles, the Air Ministry objected. It suggested that Wrens also join the ATA as it would embarrass the RAF if its women did not fly while Wrens could.¹⁷¹ The Ministry of Aircraft Production urged the Air Ministry to create a WAAF flying section whose pilots could then be seconded to the ATA in the same way as RAF

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ TNA: WO 32/13160, Secretary of State Air to Secretary of State War, 31 Mar 1947. This letter was in the context of women officers' authority under disciplinary codes being adopted for regular service.

¹⁶⁷ FOI Fleet: Employment of Women in Combat, Brief for Minister for the Armed Forces, 1 Dec 1989, Army Historical Branch information on the position in late 1940s to early 1950s.

¹⁶⁸ TNA: AIR 10/5614, Queen's Regulation number 877.

¹⁶⁹ HC Deb, 5th Ser., Vol.387, Col.769-770, 10 Mar 1943.

¹⁷⁰ TNA: WO 32/13160, Cabinet Defence Committee Paper DO(46)63, Organisation of the Women's Services in Peace, 8 May 1946.

¹⁷¹ TNA: T 162/741, Admiralty to Treasury, 9 Mar 1943 and Air Ministry response, 8 Jun 1943.

pilots.¹⁷² Air Chief Marshal Leigh Mallory, Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force, also wrote to Chief of the Air Staff in support of female pilots. He argued that women, as an integral part of the RAF, should also be 'part of its essential function – flying', particularly as Wrens could 'man (sic) craft at sea'.¹⁷³

Women were also excluded from most rear crew duties including those remote from contact with the enemy such as target drogue operations and even pigeon keepers.¹⁷⁴ Drogue operations were rejected on the grounds that women were 'physically unsuitable to the work'.¹⁷⁵ The five airwomen trained as pigeon keepers were not posted to the role because duties included training flight crews in how to release birds into the slipstream of an aircraft.¹⁷⁶ Some airwomen did eventually make it into the air in the traditional women's role of nursing. The need for medical orderlies to attend wounded personnel being evacuated by air gave rise to the 'Flying Nightingales'.¹⁷⁷ Less heralded were the short trips undertaken by female mechanics who participated in air testing of repaired equipment.¹⁷⁸

The question of women pilots was discussed for some years after the war. In 1947 Philip Noel-Baker, Secretary of State for Air, announced in the House of Commons that women aircrew would be trained 'when circumstances permitted'.¹⁷⁹ This position, agreed at the Air Council in February 1947 and again in September 1949, seemed to be more than the empty promise about seafaring made by Captain Pilkington.¹⁸⁰ However, despite attempts by successive Secretaries of State for Air (Arthur Henderson having taken over from Noel-Baker in October 1947) to bring

¹⁷² Air Historical Branch [henceforward AHB]: WAAF/WRAF Miscellaneous Papers, The Women's Royal Air Force Chapter 1 Annex G, Group Captain Williams. Document produced but not published in the Air Historical Branch, not dated.

¹⁷³ TNA: AIR 8/793, Leigh-Mallory to Under Secretary of State for Air and Chief of Air Staff, 3 Jan 1944. He was referring to harbour boat crew. A detailed account of women and flying is given in Peter Elliott, 'The RAF's First Women Pilots', *Air Clues*, May 1990, pp. 170-174. *Air Clues* is a professional journal for the RAF.

¹⁷⁴ TNA: AIR 14/1009, Third Interim Report of the Substitution Committee, Nov 1942. Drogue operators trailed targets against which fighter pilots practised air gunnery.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Anne Mettam, 'The Flying Nightingales' in A E Ross (ed.), *Through Eyes of Blue: Personal Memories of the RAF from 1918*, (Shrewsbury: AirLife Publishing, 2002), pp.164- 7.

¹⁷⁸ Recollections of female mechanics in Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue*, pp.173-176.

¹⁷⁹ HC Deb, 5th Series, Vol.435, Col.106, 17 Mar 1947. He was speaking during the debate on the Air Estimates.

¹⁸⁰ TNA: AIR 6/76, Air Council Conclusions, 13 Feb 1947 and AIR 6/78, Air Council Conclusions, 15 Sep 1949.

about a WRAF flying role, circumstances never were quite right. Objections were raised about cost, the lack of capacity in the training system, the waste of places needed for men and a lack of suitable roles.¹⁸¹ Peter Elliott, of the RAF Museum, noted that a promised review in 1951 has not been traced, but that the Air Council finally decided to drop the idea in December 1954.¹⁸² However, female pilots from the ATA could join the RAF Volunteer Reserve, as could other female pilots if they had sufficient hours of flying experience. In 1952, out of a total of 5,126 reserve force pilots, 59 were female. The scheme closed to new entrants in July 1953 when the budget for Reserve flying schools was cut.¹⁸³

Although financial arguments were made against having WRAF pilots, there were two categories of men who received flying training without giving full value for money through subsequent operational flying. Some male officers in the Technical Branch were trained to 'wings' standard although they would undertake no productive flying. It was thought to be good for the RAF if male ground branch officers had a connection with flying as it would give them a 'common outlook'.¹⁸⁴ In contrast to the argument about women aircrew, an objection about wasted resources was dismissed because cutting the programme would not achieve great economies.¹⁸⁵ Selected national servicemen also trained as aircrew up to basic flying training standard, with a commitment to keep current at this level for their period in the Reserve.¹⁸⁶ By July 1950, the RAF was training three hundred national servicemen per annum as pilots.¹⁸⁷ Peter Elliott observed that some members of the Air Council suggested it would be better to train regular members of the WRAF than national servicemen. However, their view did not prevail.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸¹ TNA: AIR 8/793, Flying Employment for Members of the Permanent Women's Service, Jun 1947, and Air Council Standing Committee Minutes, Jun 1947; Peter Elliott, 'The RAF's First Women Pilots', pp.170-74.

¹⁸² Peter Elliott, 'The RAF's First Women Pilots', p.172.

¹⁸³ TNA: AIR 20/8985, McGlennon to Private Secretary to Air Member for Personnel, 24 Sep 1952 and Brief for Auxiliary and Reserve Forces Committee Meeting, 30 Nov 1953.

¹⁸⁴ TNA: AIR 6/90, Air Council Standing Committee Conclusions, 11 Oct 1946.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ TNA: AIR 6/136, Air Council Standing Committee Memoranda, Pilot and Navigator Training, Aug 1946 and AIR 6/90, Air Council Standing Committee Conclusions, 4 Sep 1946. There were three further stages (applied training, crew training and operational conversion unit) before pilots reached operational squadrons.

¹⁸⁷ TNA: AIR 8/1591, Sandford to Sir Maurice Dean (MOD), 3 Jul 1950.

¹⁸⁸ Peter Elliott, 'The RAF's First Women Pilots', p.172.

The Services agreed that women were non-combatant. It seemed axiomatic in the Admiralty that women would not serve at sea. In the Air Ministry, flying roles were not implemented on the familiar grounds of prejudice, priority accorded to men's careers and costs.

Roles for Women

The post-war employment of women was part of broader restructuring as the armed forces restored regular service career patterns and planned peacetime national service for men. Reviews were initiated to rationalize working methods, plan the work force and cut costs. Planning to be about 30% larger than its 1938 strength, the Navy wanted to revert to regular service volunteers, backed up by a substantial trained reserve. The Admiralty Board believed that 'conscription would not on balance be to the advantage of the Navy'. Although it recognised that it would need to 'take its share of conscripts', In fact, the Navy took comparatively few national servicemen (Table 1.2).¹⁸⁹ The RAF planned for the increased importance of air power. At nearly three times its 1938 size, it would be significantly dependent on national servicemen.

Table 1.2 National Servicemen – Allocations 1947-50

Year	Number of Men		
	RN	RAF	Army
1947	12,700	48,600	122,100
1948	3,700	46,700	100,500
1949	8,100	43,100	115,400
1950	1,300	52,300	120,600

Ministry of Labour and National Service: Reports, Cmd. 7559 (Nov 1948), Cmd. 8017 (Aug 1950), Cmd. 8338 (Aug 1951), (London: HMSO).

Navy

Post-war, only 27 categories of work were expected to remain open to women. The proposed allocation of ratings had a traditional look, with over 42% of the jobs being in catering and domestic duties and a further 24% in clerical work.¹⁹⁰ Wrens work within the Fleet Air Arm was in doubt, being contingent upon the decision on

¹⁸⁹ TNA: ADM 167/126, Admiralty Board Minutes, 14 Oct 1946.

¹⁹⁰ NMRN: 1988.350.57, Permanent Service (305B), AFO 6356a/46, WRNS Ratings Allocation for December 1946, 18 Oct 46. See Appendix 3 for categories open to women.

how men's work was to be organised. One study advocated more integration with seagoing categories, which would have reduced opportunities for Wrens. A second study favoured the wartime system of specialist categories for aircraft work. This specialist solution prevailed. As a consequence, men in these roles would spend the bulk of their careers in shore-based work.¹⁹¹ This decision re-opened the work to Wrens.¹⁹² Abolition of other roles was also partially reversed in the late 1940s. Operator jobs in telegraphy and telephony were restored to the list and cinema operators were likewise reprieved.¹⁹³

The working party established to set up women's regular service wanted to minimize overheads to ensure the plan was economic. As a separate organisation, the WRNS had its own administrative systems and staff for matters of policy, recruiting, selection, training and drafting. At unit level, women administered discipline and undertook welfare and accommodation duties. Given the desire to keep this unproductive component small, it followed that women should not be employed in small groups which would create excessive demand for female support and supervisory staff.¹⁹⁴ The other key guiding principle was that non-administrative staff were to be employed as replacements for naval men predominantly on a one-for-one basis. However, a more generous complement of five female cooks for four men could be allowed if work was judged to be heavy.¹⁹⁵ The target strength for the WRNS kept changing. When it was set at 9,500 ratings in 1947, about 14% were expected to be employed in domestic and administrative work for the WRNS. This was described as slightly higher than the equivalent in the RN.¹⁹⁶

Branches of the Navy were invited to consider where they could employ WRNS officers in place of men. Bids were received for 201 female officers of whom 67 were to replace warrant rather than commissioned officers. This was regarded as a

¹⁹¹ According to naval historian Eric Grove, the Fleet Air Arm employed 24,000 men in shore establishments in 1947. Eric J. Grove, *Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy since World War II* (London: Bodley Head, 1987), p.27.

¹⁹² TNA: ADM 1/19887, Naval Air Personnel Committee Report, Feb 1946.

¹⁹³ NMRN: 1988.350.1-5, BR 1077(47) Regulations and Instructions WRNS, Appendices 3 and 4, 31 Dec 1947.

¹⁹⁴ TNA: WO 32/13160, Structure and Conditions of Service for the Permanent WRNS: Ratings' Paper (Jul 1947) and Officers' Paper (Oct 1946).

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, Inter-Service Working Party on the Permanent Women's Services - Final Report, 7 Jan 1948.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, Structure and Conditions of Service for the Permanent WRNS: Ratings' Paper, Jul 1947.

‘most unhealthy sign’ as it would limit the opportunities for promotion for male ratings seeking the highest non-commissioned rank.¹⁹⁷ The list was cut to reduce the number of warrant officer replacements. In addition, the requirement for cipher officers was dropped. Machines operated by ratings were being introduced instead. Specialist roles open to women included meteorology, safety equipment, air radio, communications, secretariat, pay and cash, air stores, catering, clothing and victualling.¹⁹⁸

In terms of organisation, a choice had to be made as to whether female officers were to be entered into separate, specialist branches or to form one branch. Commandant Mathews favoured the former idea for junior officers, with senior officers coming together as one branch as they would not be employed in place of men, but only on WRNS work.¹⁹⁹ However, a meeting chaired by Rear Admiral Denny decided in favour of one branch for all rather than sub-dividing a small cohort.²⁰⁰ All junior officers were to be capable of being employed on a mixture of specialist and female administration duties.²⁰¹

Air Force

While the majority of trades remained open to women post-war, changes were made.²⁰² Some roles were no longer needed, for example barrage balloon work. Others, such as air movements' assistant roles and five clerical trades, were initially reserved for national servicemen whose time spent in training was to be kept at under four months on average.²⁰³ However, women were preferred to national servicemen as radar and wireless assistants because they would give longer service.²⁰⁴ Women were excluded from the wartime role of armament assistants because it involved weapon handling. This was now seen as incompatible with their

¹⁹⁷ NMRN: 1988.350.58-9, Permanent WRNS Officer Force, 20 Aug 1946. For bids for officer posts, see Appendix 3.

¹⁹⁸ TNA: WO 32/13160, Structure and Conditions of Service for the Permanent WRNS Officer Corps, Oct 1946. See Appendix 3 for planned officer numbers.

¹⁹⁹ NMRN: 1988.350.58-9, Director WRNS to Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel, 30 May 1946.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, Minutes of Meeting, 23 Aug 1946.

²⁰¹ TNA: WO 32/13160, Structure and Conditions of Service for the Permanent WRNS: Officers' Paper, Oct 1946.

²⁰² For a list of trades for airwomen in 1949, see Appendix 3.

²⁰³ TNA: AIR 19/808, Air Member for Personnel to Secretary of State, 5 Jan 1949; AIR 2/10626, Report of the Trade Structure Committee, Part I, Mar 1949.

²⁰⁴ TNA: AIR 2/10237, Meeting on the Field of Trades Open to WAAF, 21 Oct 1948.

non-combatant status.²⁰⁵ A paper on the future of the technical branch noted that airwomen would not be trained to the highest standard as apprentice training was too long and females would not be allowed to join at the young age specified for the scheme.²⁰⁶

Unlike the WRNS which adopted a single branch, WRAF officers could join the majority of branches for non-flying personnel. The technical branch planned to take only a third of its strength as graduate entrants; the majority of places were to be filled by those commissioning from the ranks. However, with few women taking appropriate degrees and airwomen not eligible for apprenticeships and so not reaching the top echelon of engineering trades, there would be limited opportunities. In addition, women were deemed incapable of managing a section comprised predominantly of men. The wartime practice of employing female officers to supervise airwomen working in signals and radar operations was discontinued. Thus, available technical branch jobs were reduced to a handful in statistics and analytical work.²⁰⁷ This unwelcoming approach led to the near demise of the female technical officer, with just two appearing in the Air Force List of 1948.²⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the Technical Branch remained on the list of opportunities open to WRAF officers.²⁰⁹

There was an important structural difference between the WRAF and the WRNS. The WRAF would not administer itself but it would be integrated into RAF systems. Consequently, it was estimated that only 1.4% of women would not be in roles also open to men.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ TNA: AIR 20/6538, S11 to DWAAF, 5 Mar 1947. Apprentices were aged 15½ - 17 on entry. Women could not join until they were 17½ - 18 (see Chapter 2).

²⁰⁷ Ibid, Employment of WAAF Officers in the Technical Branch, Apr 1947. See Appendix 3 for officer branches for the WRAF.

²⁰⁸ *Air Force List*, (London: HMSO, October 1948). The technical branch included engineering, signals and armaments. Of approximately 417 female officers employed in signals during the war, the vast majority were part of the administration and special duties branch. Only about 45 were commissioned in the technical branch (TNA: AIR 20/6538, Employment of WAAF Officers in the Technical Branch, Apr 1947).

²⁰⁹ TNA: AIR 2/11882, Air Ministry Order A76, 20 Jan 1949.

²¹⁰ TNA: WO 32/13160, Comparative Statement of Draft Schemes 16 Aug 1947.

Conclusion

'Lessening the need for men' was not the key driver behind policy decisions in either the Air Ministry or the Admiralty. As plans developed for the post-war period, women were seen in both Ministries as implying the loss of an equivalent number of more useful men. Women's Services would put a strain on budgets as they came with overhead costs for administration, training and accommodation. Women would serve for shorter periods of time than regular servicemen, leading to additional recruiting to find replacements.

However, it was common ground that women would be needed in a future major war. The question to be resolved was how to prepare for that eventuality. Would reserve forces be adequate or was there merit in maintaining regular cadres? In the Air Ministry, the outcome hinged on Air Marshal Slessor overturning Air Marshals Sutton and Evill's preference for a reserve only. Slessor's main argument was based on the need for all components of the RAF to be ready at the start of hostilities and lessons of the early war years' problems in creating women's corps from scratch. In 1946, military need overcame residual objections concerning lack of value for money. As the challenge of maintaining the size of the RAF became clearer, lessening the need for men was an additional argument in favour of employing women. While the War Office reached the same conclusion, the Admiralty was reluctant because it was less reliant on women. As with national service, it went along with the other Services, although it would have preferred to revert to an all-male, volunteer Navy.

Having determined that there would be regular service for women, the Air Ministry decided that they would be integrated into the RAF. This policy flowed from the view that women were interchangeable with men in ground-based work, including on operational stations. The 'WRAF' did not exist as an organisation, rather it was an administrative designation. Women enlisted or commissioned into the RAF and had the same powers of command as men. Rank insignia were identical to men's. However, full equality was denied when different titles were retained for senior officer ranks. The debate on titles revealed not only a view that women would not expect to command men at more senior levels, but also ambiguity over the RAF's

application of flying related ranks to officers (male and female) who were only employed in ground-based branches. This argument illustrated the key divide in the RAF which was between those who flew and those who did not. It was not solely a phenomenon of gender.

In contrast, the WRNS remained a separate Service with civilian status. The Admiralty deemed it unacceptable for shore-based women to have the same standing of rank and authority as seagoing men. The ruling that the Naval Discipline Act would not apply to the WRNS was rooted in women's inferior position in the Navy. However, it was presented in terms of Wrens' superiority over airwomen and female soldiers. The decision resulted in women not exercising powers of command in their own right. Wrens were marked out as distinctive also through rank titles and uniform insignia, aiding a strong female identity which was much less evident for airwomen.

Gender was the primary factor in consideration of combatant status and roles. As a matter of policy and crucially for career prospects, women were treated as non-combatants. They were excluded from small arms training, flying and seagoing. There was no discussion of seagoing for Wrens. The Admiralty treated as self evident that women, by virtue of their gender, would not be sailors. However, the issues were more open to debate in the other Services. In the War Office, some argued unsuccessfully for women to be armed for self defence. It is unclear to what extent the Air Ministry considered this self defence question. Small arms training was contentious even for airmen in ground-based trades. Nevertheless, airmen were obliged to undertake annual weapons' training and had the liability to be armed if the need arose. Airwomen did not. The Air Ministry's deliberations on flying policy brought out a distinction between aircraft types. It was agreed in principle (though ultimately not in practice) that women could fly passenger aircraft, but not armed aircraft. This distinction between types of aeroplanes would allow women to be described as non-combatant. Nevertheless, men flying unarmed aircraft still enjoyed 'combatant' status, although they were lower in status than men flying armed aircraft.

All three Services cut back roles available to women compared with the wartime peak. The majority of RAF support trades were open to women in theory, although there was evidence of stereotypical bias against their employment in engineering. Women were also initially not eligible for some roles because of the need to find productive work for national servicemen whose even shorter period of service limited their usefulness. For officers, of lasting significance was the move to professional support roles. The benefit of having dedicated officers rather than aircrew in roles such as engineering, catering and administration had been proven during the war. These specialist ground-based roles for officers would provide opportunities for women to pursue careers outside of the WRAF's hierarchy. Debate in the Navy again focussed on the divide between seagoing and shore-based work. This was particularly evident in the issue of whether women should continue in engineering in the Fleet Air Arm. Once the decision had been made that men would remain as aircraft specialists and would not train for other seagoing work, then these roles were re-opened to Wrens. As Lucy Noakes argued in connection with women in the army, women were seen as releasing men for higher value work at sea.

Women in the RAF and the WRNS were thus established on very different terms. The former served with men on operational stations while the latter were excluded from the environment in which the majority of men worked. As an integrated component of the air force, women had a firm foothold. The WRNS, as a separate organisation from the men's Service, was less well established. The implications of these different starting points and the transition from temporary to regular status are taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Establishing Women's Military Careers: Striking a Balance between Gender and Armed Forces' Norms

In the autumn of 1948, an exchange of correspondence between Sir Stafford Cripps (Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Albert Alexander (formerly First Sea Lord, now Minister for Defence) on terms of service encapsulated their different perspectives on servicewomen. Cripps suggested that female officers should be paid on the civilian nurses' pay scale. Cripps described nurses as 'an important class of professional women engaged on women's work' and he argued that their pay provided a more appropriate comparator than that of male officers.¹ Alexander rejected Cripps' proposal, arguing that it was 'hardly calculated to make women officers feel that they [were] an integral part of their respective Services.'²

Were female military personnel to be treated as 'women', with civilian employment norms prevailing, or as 'service personnel', fitting into the existing armed forces regulations? How was this concept of a new career for women to be realised?

Through examination of the Directors of the women's Services and their roles, the devising of terms and conditions of service, and the career structures put in place for the WRNS and the WRAF, this chapter suggests that the outcomes were a balance between the application of armed forces and civilian norms. Women's non-combatant status is seen as a key factor in pay negotiations and in establishing career paths. In adopting conservative approaches to regulations and practices on marriage and pregnancy, the idea of long-term careers for women was fundamentally flawed. Policy-makers failed to address the barriers to family life that David French also observed as hindering men's army careers following the Second World War.³ In addition to gender-based factors, what also emerges is the importance of the RAF's and the RN's differing organisational philosophies of integration and separation in the shape that women's military careers were to take, the ethos of the women's Services and the scope for female leadership.

¹ TNA: T213/489, Cripps to Alexander, 8 Sep 1948.

² Ibid, Alexander to Cripps, 22 Oct 1948.

³ David French, *Military Identities*, p.293.

The Directors and Their Roles⁴

Drafting a history of the WAAF after the war, Group Officer Constance Woodhead assessed the problem of finding senior women officers in these terms:

'Our ages varied from twenty-five to near fifty ... one of us, at least, bore an ancient and noble name, many were from "good county" families [original emphasis], some from the professional classes, some from the world of commerce ... but hardly one career woman, not a single University don or teacher, hardly a woman with serious experience of public or business life behind her. ... women already launched on a successful career were naturally, in all but a few cases, unable or unwilling to give up that career for a nebulous future in anything as new as a women's military service. It was left to a handful of inexperienced women ... to guide and control the very big service which the WAAF became.'⁵

Her assessment echoed that made earlier by Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, the first Director of the ATS. An academic at Birkbeck College, she was able to take on the role in 1938 with the approval of College authorities because its lecture programmes were held in the evenings.⁶ She observed that initially women officers tended to be 'leisured women' and that 'the officers who would be best worth having in war were by no means always those who could give most time in peace. ... The result, in spite of brilliant exceptions, was too large a proportion of the type of officer who was not accustomed to regular or exacting work.'⁷ Despite these misgivings, the women who would have the responsibility of helping to shape the women's regular Services emerged from those who had risen to the top during the Second World War.

Women's Royal Naval Service

In 1939, the Admiralty appointed Vera Laughton Mathews to be the Director of the WRNS. Born in 1888, the daughter of a naval officer and a Spanish born, Italian

⁴ A list of Directors of the WRNS and WAAF/WRAF is at Appendix 4.

⁵ RAFM: X002.5638, Woodhead/Welsh Papers, Constance Woodhead, unpublished manuscript, Ch.XIII, pp.7-8.

⁶ Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service with the Army*, p.96.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.94.

mother, she served as a WRNS officer in the First World War.⁸ She had the ideal combination of service culture in her family and previous experience. Between the wars, she maintained her WRNS' connections by taking the role of Vice President of the Wrens' Association.⁹ University educated, she had worked as a journalist and had been active in the women's suffrage movement.¹⁰ She put her own name forward for consideration for a role in the re-formed WRNS.¹¹ She mentioned in her application that she was married with three school-age children and was surprised not to be questioned about her family responsibilities.¹² She went on to serve throughout the war and into the early phase of preparation for the introduction of the permanent Service.

Mathews handed over to Jocelyn Woollcombe in November 1946. With Angela Goodenough, the other potential contender, having died suddenly while serving in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in February 1946, Woollcombe was the obvious choice as successor.¹³ She, too, came from a family rich in experience of Service life. Her father was a naval officer and her mother the daughter of a colonel. Woollcombe had worked as a clerk in Naval Intelligence from 1916-1919 and joined the WRNS in 1939. She served as Deputy Director from 1943 with responsibility for recruiting and training. She held the Director's role for four years, relinquishing the post in 1950.¹⁴

Women's Auxiliary Air Force / Women's Royal Air Force

The Admiralty found female leaders in whom it had confidence by virtue of their family backgrounds, pre-war experience and competence in office. The Air Council's experience was not as satisfactory as it lost trust in the Director of the WAAF in 1943. Jane Trefusis Forbes, a successful business woman who had been a company commander in the ATS from 1938, was appointed in 1939. Born in 1899

⁸ Lesley Thomas, 'Mathews, Dame Elvira Sibyl Maria Laughton (1888-1959)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [henceforward ODNB].

⁹ The Wrens' Association was established in 1920.

¹⁰ ODNB: Lesley Thomas, 'Mathews, Dame Elvira Sibyl Maria Laughton'.

¹¹ Mathews, *Blue Tapestry*, p.53.

¹² It was not until 1941 that it became policy to accept mothers with school age children in the armed forces. TNA: T 162/688, Notes of a meeting, 23 Jan 1941.

¹³ Goodenough's obituary in the *Wren* magazine noted that she was appointed as Deputy Director in 1939 and subsequently took on the welfare brief. NMRN: 1988.350.99.4, *The Wren*, No.171, Apr 1946, p.4.

¹⁴ ODNB: Lesley Thomas, 'Woollcombe, Dame Jocelyn May (1898-1986)'.

in Chile, where her father was working as a civil engineer, she had served during the First World War in the Women's Volunteer Reserve.¹⁵ Trefusis Forbes' tenure ended in crisis, the catalyst for which was Violet Markham's report on amenities and welfare in the women's Services. Markham considered the WAAF to be over-centralized, with too much authority vested in the Directorate. She made a number of recommendations for delegation of powers to Headquarters and Air Ministry departments. Trefusis Forbes and Air Marshal Sutton (Air Member for Personnel) disagreed over the report and her relationship with her superiors never recovered. She noted at the time that Sutton had told her that she was 'down the drain with the Air Council'.¹⁶ The situation was resolved when Canada sought a visit to mark the anniversaries of its women's Services. Trefusis Forbes was promoted and dispatched to North America, relinquishing her appointment as Director at the end of September 1943 in order to 'carry out "this very important special duty"'.¹⁷

Air Chief Marshal Portal had to recommend a successor to Trefusis Forbes to Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Secretary of State. He asked Air Marshal Sutton to suggest candidates. Sutton listed the nine most senior female officers, dismissing five of them as not having strong enough physiques to cope with the demands of the job. Another was rejected as 'temperamentally unsuited', leaving three officers to consider.¹⁸ Portal turned to his usual confidant, Wilfrid Freeman, for advice. Freeman, formerly Vice Chief of the Air Staff, was running the Ministry of Aircraft Production. However, he took a close interest in the WAAF in which his wife, Elizabeth, was an officer. In his parting shot as Vice Chief, he sent a paper to Air Council members including a diatribe about the quality of WAAF senior officers.¹⁹ He believed that 'the wrong people are in high places' and this was leading to a decline in efficiency.²⁰ Noted for being forthright, he now marked the women's

¹⁵ ODNB: Tessa Stone, 'Forbes, Dame (Katherine) Jane Trefusis (1899-1971)'.

¹⁶ RAFM: AC 72/17 Box 3, handwritten note by Trefusis Forbes, 3 Nov 1942.

¹⁷ Christ Church, Oxford [henceforward ChCh]: Portal Papers, Box C, File 4, Minute from AMP to Secretary of State, 3 Sep 1943. Trefusis Forbes left the Service after completing tours to Canada, the USA and India. She regretted not being involved in the establishment of regular service and offered her services again in 1948 during the crisis over Berlin. Her offer was declined. RAFM: AC 72/17/3 Box 2, letter from Air Ministry to Trefusis Forbes, 19 Jul 1948.

¹⁸ ChCh: Portal Papers, Box D, File 5, AMP to CAS, 9 Jun 1943.

¹⁹ TNA: AIR 6/62, Air Council Memoranda, WAAF Administration, 16 Oct 1942.

²⁰ Ibid.

card.²¹ Two were dismissed as 'dear old things' and another pair as 'weak'. One was described as 'mannerless and hopeless', the next as 'ill ... presumably suffering from the change of life'.²² Of the three names left on Sutton's list, he thought one was 'weak' and another 'hopelessly weak and tarred with the same brush as the present Director'.²³ That left Wing Officer Wynne-Eaton, whom Freeman saw as a candidate for deputy rather than Director.²⁴

Portal and Freeman favoured a less senior officer who did not feature on Sutton's list. This was Felicity Hanbury, a friend of Elizabeth Freeman. She seemed to fit to perfection the model of an officer. Public school educated and presented at Court, her father had been a colonel in the army and her mother was the daughter of a politician. Having learned to fly, but with insufficient solo hours to satisfy the Air Transport Auxiliary, she made a successful career in the WAAF. Widowed early in the war, she was decorated with the MBE (military division) for her work at Biggin Hill during the Battle of Britain. In 1943 she was a squadron officer at Headquarters Bomber Command. In August of that year, she was promoted to acting wing officer and appointed to run the women's officer training school at Windermere.²⁵

Having had his list of contenders rejected, Sutton put forward the next most senior female officer. Freeman's advice now was to 'lock up [Sutton] in an asylum' as his recommendation was 'the pleasantest but certainly the least fitted [WAAF officer] to be head of any Service'.²⁶ Forwarding Sutton's brief to Sir Archibald Sinclair (Secretary of State for Air), Portal added his own recommendation of Felicity Hanbury. In defence of her age and lack of seniority (she was 30 years old and, having just been promoted to wing officer, she was two ranks below the level at which the appointment would be made), he cited the War Office's appointment of Jean Knox in 1941 in place of Helen Gwynne-Vaughan. He claimed that this had been a remarkable success.²⁷ However, the War Office was about to dispense with

²¹ John Terraine, *The Right of the Line: the Royal Air Force in the European War 1939-1945*, (Sevenoaks: Sceptre, 1988), p.44.

²² ChCh: Portal Papers, Box D, File 5, Freeman to Portal, 11 Jun 1943.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Peake Papers: Box 6, Record of Service, Air Historical Branch, 28 Apr 1987.

²⁶ ChCh: Portal Papers, Box C, File 4, Freeman to Portal, 5 Sep 1943.

²⁷ ChCh: Portal Papers, Box C, File 3, CAS to Secretary of State, 16 Sep 1943.

Jean Knox's services. She retired at the age of 35 under circumstances that Roy Terry judged as never fully explained.²⁸

Sir Arthur Sinclair was not persuaded by Portal's case for Hanbury. Lady Welsh, who had also been favoured by Freeman, was appointed. Mary Welsh was in uncertain health and Portal expressed doubts as to whether she would stand the strains of the role.²⁹ However, she had been successful as Inspector for the WAAF. Her potential appointment was also seen as politically sensitive because she was married to Air Marshal Sir William Welsh who was then serving as Head of an RAF delegation in the USA. Portal was conscious of the potential for accusations of nepotism, but he was prepared to defend her appointment.³⁰ Mary Welsh took up the job in October 1943, holding the post for three years.

Welsh's performance disappointed as she did not tackle the issue of 'clearing out the deadwood' perceived by Portal and Freeman amongst senior women.³¹ The latter concluded in 1945 that he had been 'utterly wrong about Welsh' and lamented that he had recommended her for the job.³² Felicity Hanbury remained the favoured officer and Portal kept an eye on her progress. Crucially, he intervened in 1944 to prevent a case being made against her for inefficiency.³³ Not only talented but enjoying the patronage of the Chief of the Air Staff, Hanbury continued upwards and was given postings at home and abroad which put her in the leading position when Welsh retired. Although only 33, this time there were no objections to her appointment on 1 December 1946. At last, the Air Council had found a female

²⁸ Roy Terry, *Women in Khaki*, pp.132-33. Knox retired in October 1943.

²⁹ ChCh: Portal Papers, Box C, File 3, CAS to Secretary of State, 16 Sep 1943.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² ChCh: Portal Papers, Box D, File 3, Freeman to Portal, 22 Mar 1945.

³³ At the Women Officers' School, Hanbury crossed the station commander where the school was based and Headquarters' staff (including the senior WAAF officer) who sided with him. But Hanbury had a host of impressive supporters, Violet Markham and Helen Gwynne-Vaughan amongst them. Portal, alerted by Freeman, called for the papers and dismissed the case as ill-founded. (ChCh: Portal Papers, Box D, Folder 3, correspondence between Freeman and Portal, Mar and Apr 1944; Box C, File 6, papers on the case against Hanbury, May 1944 and Portal to AMP 14 May 1944 and 1 Jun 1944).

leader from a Service family, educated at public school and with 'belly fire' that seemed to be the model for an officer.³⁴

Each of the women's Services had new Directors in 1946 who would see them through the transition from wartime auxiliaries to regular service status. These new leaders (Jocelyn Woollcombe for the WRNS, Mary Tyrwhitt for the ATS and Felicity Hanbury for the WAAF) had the benefit of experience gained throughout the war, though this was still significantly less than that of men of equivalent rank.

Roles of the Directors

For the Air Force and the Navy, the adopted philosophies of integration with or separation from the men's Service were crucial to the roles of the Directors.

Based in the Air Ministry, the WRAF Director worked in the Air Member for Personnel's department under the Director General Personnel. Her position was mainly advisory. Recognizing that women being employed in a predominantly male service might need special consideration, Air Ministry departments were obliged to consult her on policy issues affecting employment or well-being. The Director was not responsible for training, technical efficiency or discipline.³⁵ Her executive authority was limited to the disposal of compassionate cases for postings or discharge. Her staff also participated in the selection of commissioning candidates and had a say in the posting of officers. Regulations gave the Director the right to visit any station where airwomen served. She also had direct access to any member of the Air Council, which marked the unique nature of the appointment as such access was not granted to men of equivalent rank.³⁶

Following negotiation with the Treasury, Felicity Hanbury's Directorate was established for two group officers, three wing officers, three squadron officers and six flight officers, three junior ranks and two civilian clerks. Three of these officers

³⁴ For views on officer qualities: TNA: AIR 20/8992, Air Marshal Embry to Air Member for Personnel, 31 Jan 1950 and AIR 75/47, Chief of Air Staff to Air Member for Personnel, 15 Aug 1951.

³⁵ TNA: AIR 2/11882, Rank and Status of Director WRAF, undated minute circa 1948.

³⁶ TNA: T 213/288, Monk-Jones (Air Ministry) to Clough (Treasury), 2 Nov 1948.

were shared with the Personnel Services Directorates.³⁷ However, the previous practice of having dedicated female administration officers at Command and Group Headquarters was abolished. Administrative officers now joined the more widely employable RAF Secretarial branch and all female officers were to train to deal with women's administration in addition to their specialist function.³⁸

In contrast to the advisory role in the WRAF, the importance of which was forecast to decline as integration of women into the RAF progressed, the Director WRNS had executive authority as head of her Service.³⁹ She was responsible for recruiting of ratings, the selection, appointment and promotion of officers and initial recruit training and she advised on other issues. She was answerable to the Admiralty for the performance of the WRNS and for its morale and well-being.⁴⁰ As with the WRAF, the WRNS Directorate worked in the personnel area.

The wartime system of female administrative officers in the WRNS continued. The authority of the Director WRNS as head of Service conferred greater status to this network of administrative officers compared with the advisory roles that pertained in the WRAF. As well as posts at Command Headquarters, special posts were established at each unit where Wrens were employed. Known as Unit Officers, these women were responsible for training junior officers and NCOs in their general service duties, welfare, accommodation, discipline, programmes of education and vocational training, and sport. They were mostly of first officer rank and were treated as heads of department, although they were junior in rank to men who ran departments.⁴¹ Attending regular management meetings with men running establishments, unit officers had more power than WRAF officers who undertook women's administration only as an additional duty. Unit Officers provided an important mechanism for encouraging and maintaining a sense of identity among Wrens and for enforcing standards of dress and behaviour.

³⁷ Ibid and reply 27 Nov 1948.

³⁸ TNA: AIR 2/11882, Air Ministry Order A76, 20 Jan 1949.

³⁹ TNA: AIR 2/11882, Rank and Status of Director WRAF, undated minute circa 1948.

⁴⁰ NMRN: 1988.350.1-5, BR 1077, Regulations and Instructions for the WRNS, Dec 1947 and Nov 1951 editions.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Terms and Conditions of Service

Period of Service

The Directors negotiated different joining ages for women compared with men and shorter periods of engagement. The latter was set at 4 years, on the assumption that young women would not wish to make a longer commitment.⁴² Age on entry was set at a minimum of 17 ½ or 18 in response to perceptions that it was inappropriate for younger girls to join the Services.⁴³ The RAF's post-war planning committee feared that young girls would be a welfare burden on their officers and, if 'anything went wrong, there would be a greater reason for public outcry.'⁴⁴

Marriage and Pregnancy

Like other employers, the Service Ministries had to decide whether employment of married women would continue post-war.⁴⁵ The Air Ministry's post-war manning policy committee was divided on the issue. In April 1944, those who favoured discharging women on marriage carried the argument.⁴⁶ However, the question was discussed again later that year in the context of how to find sufficient women to serve for long enough to reach senior leadership ranks, both commissioned and non-commissioned. Requiring married women to leave would result in the loss of potential candidates. Air Commandant Lady Welsh successfully argued in favour of women being given an option of discharge on marriage rather than automatic discharge. Accepting the retention of women who married while in the Service, the Committee then proposed that married women and widows be eligible to join. The recommendation that married women be permitted to serve came with the proviso that they could show that they would be available for posting wherever needed, including overseas.⁴⁷

⁴² TNA: ADM 116/5579, Inter Service Working Party - Final Report, circa Jan 1948. Initial periods of regular service for youths varied from 5 years to 12 years (Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Careers for Men and Women: His Majesty's Forces*, (London: HMSO, 1950)).

⁴³ Minimum age on joining varied periodically but was not reduced below 17. For example, *Report of the Advisory Committee on Recruiting*, Cmnd.545, (London: HMSO, October 1958) suggested that recruiting age be reduced to 17 as it would entail no additional administrative difficulties compared with the prevailing minimum age of 17½.

⁴⁴ Peake Papers: Box 5, Post-War Planning Committee, 18th Interim Report, 14 Sep 1946.

⁴⁵ A small survey of local government, banks, railway companies and an airline, the BBC, and five large manufacturers showed that they had pre-war marriage bars but employed married women during the war. Of those that had decided a post-war policy, most stated an intention to re-introduce a marriage bar. *Marriage Bar in the Civil Service*, Cmd. 6886, (London: HMSO, 1946), pp.19-22.

⁴⁶ TNA: AIR 2/7824, Committee on Policy for Manning Post-War RAF, 14 Apr 1944.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 48th meeting, 3 Nov 1944 and 6th Interim Report, Dec 1944.

Like the planning committee in 1944, the Air Council was divided on the question of married women's employment when it considered terms of service in 1947. Air Marshal Sir William Dickson, Vice Chief of the Air Staff, took particular issue with commissioning of married women as officers. He argued that it was 'a great mistake', claiming that it was 'anti-social' and 'introduced an element of inflexibility in posting'.⁴⁸ It is not clear whether this latter point implied a need to post married personnel with some degree of geographic proximity or whether the emphasis was on the undesirability of having married personnel serving at the same location. What is certain is that the posting of married women was regarded as problematic. Felicity Hanbury, in attendance at the Air Council meeting, suggested that 'from the administrative point of view, it would be of the greatest value to have a few married women in the Service.'⁴⁹ Her views were not elaborated in the minutes. She may have been making the same point as in 1944 about retaining candidates for senior ranks. With Hanbury receiving support from Air Marshal Slessor (Air Member for Personnel), the Air Council opted to allow married women to serve, subject to 'adequate administrative safeguards' being introduced.⁵⁰

One such safeguard appears to have been the right of husbands of married applicants to object, though actual consent was not required.⁵¹ Recruiting literature made explicit the need for married women to prove they could fulfil service obligations.⁵² What would constitute such proof was already seen as problematic. In 1947, Commandant Jocelyn Woollcombe noted that 'experience [was] daily showing the difficulty of establishing the mobility of married women applicants'.⁵³

Having determined that married women could join, the issue of those with children below the school leaving age (15 from 1947) also had to be addressed. In society at the time, there was an expectation that married women with young children would

⁴⁸ TNA: AIR 6/76, Air Council Conclusions, 13 Feb 1947.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ TNA: AIR 2/7824, Conditions of Service and Emoluments of Women Employed in the RAF, Amendments to Note by the Air Ministry, Apr 1947.

⁵² Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Careers for Men and Women: His Majesty's Forces*, (London: HMSO, 1950), Part D (WRNS) and Part H (WRAF); TNA: AIR 20/8992, 'Give Your Ambition Wings', information pamphlet, circa 1950.

⁵³ NMRN: 1988.350.57, WRNS Permanent Service Working Party, DWRNS to Head of Naval Branch, 2 Jan 1947.

not take paid employment outside of the home.⁵⁴ Employment in the armed forces brought difficulties beyond those of most other work places. Frequent postings to different locations and hence separation from a woman's family network, accommodation difficulties due to the shortage of married quarters and restrictions on married couples working at the same establishment would make it extremely difficult for a married woman with children to serve on full military terms.

For the servicewomen's Directors the willingness of all women to accept postings was crucial. If these smaller, peacetime Services were to be efficient, they could not afford cohorts that would only serve locally as in the wartime WRNS. In addition, enforcement of compulsory service overseas for women, avoided during the war, was now essential in the RAF because the establishment for WAAF personnel in Germany exceeded the supply of volunteers.⁵⁵ The Air Ministry preferred airwomen to national servicemen for overseas duty because tours of duty abroad needed to be for about two years duration. Conscripted men would not serve for long enough to make overseas postings economic.⁵⁶ Air Commandant Hanbury believed that women with children under the school leaving age would be unable to make the necessary commitment to serve where needed and that they should be excluded from joining. This was adopted as policy.⁵⁷

Rules on pregnancy were simple; discharge was automatic. In the WRAF, it occurred as soon as the pregnancy was reported.⁵⁸ This was not contentious. It was common ground that the obligations of new motherhood were incompatible with military service. However, Commandant Jocelyn Woollcombe feared that the consequence of such a policy would be that ' "career" [original emphasis] WRNS Officers must almost inevitably be single women or at any rate women without families.'⁵⁹ She wanted female officers to be able to rejoin and compete for senior

⁵⁴ Pat Thane, 'Women Since 1945', in Paul Johnson (ed.), *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1994), pp.394-5.

⁵⁵ TNA: AIR 2/9278, WAAF Liability for Overseas Service, Air Member for Personnel, 22 Jul 1947.

⁵⁶ Ibid, Henderson to Alexander, 22 Nov 1947. The period of national service was expected to be 12 months. It was increased to 18 months and, due to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, it became 2 years.

⁵⁷ TNA: AIR 6/76, Air Council Conclusions, 24 Jul 1947. Felicity Hanbury was in attendance.

⁵⁸ TNA: AIR 19/808, Air Ministry Order A.75, 20 Jan 1949. Reference to discharge of Wrens on pregnancy did not quote the point at which women left the Service (NMRN: 1988.350.28, Notes from Conference of Senior Women Officers, 25 Oct 1949).

⁵⁹ NMRN: 1988.350.58-9, Director WRNS to Secretary to Second Sea Lord, 30 Sep 1946.

posts when 'their family responsibilities were less onerous'.⁶⁰ Rear Admiral Denny (Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel) was not enthusiastic. He believed that 'the practice of importing a number of ex-officers in the higher ranks as a matter of course was most undesirable'.⁶¹ He thought that encouraging women to return should only be considered if there was a lack of suitable candidates for promotion.⁶²

Pregnancy of unmarried women was a particular concern to the authorities. In her memoir, Felicity Hanbury recalled that dealing with the discharge of pregnant single women had always 'held a very important place in the work of the WAAF administrative officers'.⁶³ In such cases, the WAAF officer guided the woman to civilian agencies that could provide assistance, advised on how to register for work, and how to claim support from the father, through the civil courts if necessary.⁶⁴ When regulations for the regular WRAF were discussed at a meeting of Air Member for Personnel and his senior staff, Felicity Hanbury recorded that she 'listened, spellbound, to these men discussing, apparently in all sincerity, what punishment they should mete out to any airwoman or WRAF officer who became illegitimately pregnant'.⁶⁵ Her opinion not being sought, she apparently interjected, ' "And what do you propose to do to the men involved? ... Promote them to Air Marshals, I suppose?" ' ⁶⁶

However, the Air Council did believe it had leadership obligations on moral standards and it took pregnancy of unmarried women seriously, particularly if fathers were in the RAF. Echoing a letter issued in May 1945, Air Marshal Sir Leslie Hollinghurst (Air Member for Personnel October 1949 - October 1952) wrote to Commanders-in-Chief asking them to issue orders on the subject of moral

⁶⁰ Ibid, Notes of a Meeting held on 19 Jun 1946 and Director WRNS to Secretary to Second Sea Lord, 30 Sep 1946.

⁶¹ Ibid, Notes of a Meeting held on 19 Jun 1946.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Felicity Peake, *Pure Chance*, (Shrewsbury: Airline Publishing, 1993) p.172. (Felicity Hanbury became Felicity Peake on marriage to Harald Peake in 1952). Indeed, the wartime WAAF Pamphlet Number 1, issued by the Director WAAF, was a guidance note on dealing with pregnant airwomen. (April 1942 issue in Peake Papers: Box 1).

⁶⁴ Peake Papers: Box 1, WAAF Pamphlet Number 1, Apr 1942.

⁶⁵ Peake, *Pure Chance*, p.172.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

responsibility and social relationships to officers and men under their command.⁶⁷ He acknowledged that relationships were inevitable. Where these led to marriage, he welcomed them. He described airwomen as making 'the finest possible wives for men making a career in the RAF', having a 'steadying influence ... on their husbands.'⁶⁸ However, relationships that resulted in pregnancy outside marriage were condemned as having a disproportionately damaging impact on the woman who had to give up her job and then cope with the social stigma and financial hardship of single motherhood. Such cases also resulted in bad publicity for the RAF and could hinder recruiting to the WRAF.⁶⁹

Hollinghurst regarded men as 'invariably by all standards the more blameworthy' for pregnancy outside marriage than airwomen.⁷⁰ He directed that, where a man was senior in rank and was considered to have taken advantage of a young airwoman, he was to be charged under the Air Force Act. Advice was given on talks for men on conducting proper relationships with airwomen, sex education for young airwomen, steering young women away from the perils of excessive drinking, and the process for swift posting away to another station if an inappropriate relationship was detected. A system of collecting data on pregnancy of single women by RAF station was to be introduced. Station commanders were warned that 'When the incidence [was] unduly high it [would] normally be held to reflect upon the power of command and leadership ... and appropriate action should follow.'⁷¹ The paper did not quote an 'acceptable' average. Although the letter suggested great anxiety on the issue, it also noted that the incidence of pregnancy outside of marriage was lower than in the same age group in society. However, Air Marshal Hollinghurst pointed out that the RAF should have higher standards than the civilian community.⁷²

⁶⁷ TNA: AIR 19/808, AMP to Commanders in Chief, 24 Jun 1950. The earlier letter (Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, May 1945) was written when there was concern about an increase in pregnancy in single women.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. Hollinghurst's letter did not include statistics. However, research covering a 2.5 year period to June 1949 recorded 318 discharges of unmarried, pregnant airwomen (TNA: AIR 32/298, WRAF Wastage by Marriage and Pregnancy, Sep 1949).

Discharge on pregnancy was on the agenda at the conference of Senior WRNS Officers in October 1949. Apparently discussing pregnancy of single women, the notes recorded that investigations 'had produced some very horrifying figures'.⁷³ Wrens' failings were attributed to 'lack of standard and moral conviction, drink and ignorance'.⁷⁴ The merits of the talk on sex given during recruit training were called into question. Some thought it did more harm than good. Representatives from the Commands at Nore and Plymouth blamed large shared cabins that allowed 'girls to listen and take part in undesirable talk'.⁷⁵ Presumably taking idleness as a sign of degeneracy, the Plymouth representative also condemned 'the habit of WRNS ratings of lying in bed all Sunday morning'.⁷⁶ Commandant Woollcombe undertook to review the approach to sex education in initial training and, meanwhile, urged her colleagues to do 'everything possible to improve the moral tone'.⁷⁷

Marriage and pregnancy curtailed women's service. Coupled with the need to decide whether to sign on for a further period every four years, regulations contributed to a pattern of short service by women.

Pay

Emoluments for regular servicemen were made up of basic pay, benefits in kind and marriage allowance. Basic pay was set on an assessment of the needs of single men on the assumption that they lived in barracks and food was provided. Marriage allowance was paid to men provided they were old enough to qualify. From July 1946, the qualifying ages were 25 for officers and 21 for non-commissioned men.⁷⁸ Its value was about 30% of total remuneration. For example, following the pay rise in July 1946, a married RAF corporal received 35 shillings a week marriage allowance in addition to basic pay which ranged per week from 52 shillings and 6 pence (unskilled) to 66 shillings and 6 pence (highest skilled) and benefits in kind

⁷³ NMRN: 1988.350.28, Notes from Conference of Senior Women Officers, 25 Oct 1949.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ RAFM: C. G. Burge (ed.), 'White Paper on Post-War Pay, Allowances and Service Pensions and Gratuities for Members of the Forces below Officer Rank' and Post-War Code of Pay, Allowances, Retired Pay and Service Gratuities for Commissioned Officers', *Royal Air Force Quarterly*, Vol.17, 1945-46, pp.111-16 and 177-79. Pre-war qualifying ages were: junior ranks 25 (RN), 26 (Army and RAF); officers age 30. Married women were not eligible for the allowance.

valued at 20 shillings.⁷⁹ The 1946 pay rise was said to give non-commissioned single men total emoluments below those of male, semi-skilled industrial workers and married men more.⁸⁰ Peacetime national servicemen earned less than regular service single men.⁸¹

Women's pay as wartime auxiliaries had been set within this armed forces pay structure. In 1938, the War Office considered setting the rate at 50% of single men's pay. However, in recognition that this was too low compared with the pay of female industrial workers, it settled on a rate of two-thirds of that paid to single men, plus similar benefits in kind (uniform, accommodation, medical services). When the WAAF was formed out of the ATS, it adopted this principle. The WRNS moved to the two-thirds ratio in 1940, having initially paid women according to norms for female civilian counterparts.⁸² Servicewomen were not entitled to marriage allowance because it was assumed that it was a husband's responsibility to provide for his family.⁸³ However, a widowed servicewoman with dependent children could receive the allowance.⁸⁴

The link to men's pay was broken in 1946 when women received a flat rate increase rather than two-thirds of men's new rates.⁸⁵ A number of reasons were given: lack of detail of the terms of regular service for women, including whether they would serve on short engagements or full career terms; uncertainty about the outcome of the Royal Commission on Equal Pay; and implications for lower paid nurses if the two-thirds rate persisted.⁸⁶

Service Ministries took two years to conclude work on career structures and agree a common line on pay. In the Air Ministry, two factors militated against equal pay:

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp.111-16. Value of benefits in kind from TNA: T 213/489, Notes on Revised Scales of Pay for the Permanent Women's Services, 25 Aug 1948.

⁸⁰ TNA: ADM 116/5579, Minute by Head of Naval Branch II, 11 Sep 1947.

⁸¹ TNA: AIR 72/40, Air Ministry Order, A.685, 9 Nov 1950.

⁸² TNA: ADM 116/5579, Report of Working Party - Women's Emoluments, 21 May 1946.

⁸³ Mathews, *Blue Tapestry*, p.81. She described marriage allowance as 'answer[ing] the usual objections to equal pay'.

⁸⁴ This provision was noted as continuing in TNA: ADM 116/5579, Minute by Dunn, Head of Naval Branch II, 11 Sep 1947 and AIR 10/5614, Queen's Regulations for the RAF, 1956 edition, Regulation 2729.

⁸⁵ ADM 116/5579, Pay Code Signal No.36, 27 Jun 1946.

⁸⁶ Ibid, Post War Pay, Allowances and Pensions - Emoluments of Women's Services, inter-departmental meeting held on 21 May 1946.

women's exclusion from the use of weapons and the burden of overseas postings which would fall on regular servicemen to a greater extent than women.⁸⁷ However, the latter reason was subsequently judged to be hazardous as 'if this was admitted, then the Army could claim higher rates [for men] than the RAF'.⁸⁸ Air Ministry officials wanted to establish in principle that women's pay should be equal to single men's once it was implemented for the civil service. Arthur Henderson, Secretary of State, agreed.⁸⁹ In the Admiralty, Commandant Woollcombe argued that, as women in senior ranks would be employed only in administration for the WRNS, pay rates should taper back to two-thirds of single men's for ranks above second officer.⁹⁰ This line was pursued by the Admiralty. However, the Air Ministry rejected it on the grounds that all women would remain employable in place of men and senior women's administrative roles were comparable to the work of men of equivalent rank.⁹¹ The War Office was content to side with the Air Ministry's proposal that women receive 80% of single men's pay, with a fall back position of 75%.⁹² Although tapering was still suggested by Mr. Edwards (Civil Lord of the Admiralty), in September 1948 Service Ministers agreed to pursue the Air Ministry's line.⁹³

Stafford Cripps was influenced by the economic crisis, the outcome of the Royal Commission on Equal Pay which reported in 1946, and government policy on pay restraint. Cripps saw danger in re-establishing even the two-thirds ratio for servicewomen's pay. Officers would receive much more than nurses. He regarded this possibility as unacceptable for a number of reasons: it would represent a 'startling' pay rise at a time of wage restraint policy; female officers, who could be appointed at a young age, would receive more money than nurses who were 'professional women engaged on women's work'; and perhaps crucially, this would lead to pay claims for armed forces nursing services which would have an impact on

⁸⁷ TNA: AIR 6/76, Air Council Conclusions, 13 Feb 1947.

⁸⁸ TNA: AIR 2/12605, Minute to Secretary of State, 20 Aug 1948.

⁸⁹ Ibid, Minute to Secretary of State, 20 Aug 1948 and Minute by Secretary of State, 1 Sep [1948].

⁹⁰ TNA: ADM 116/5579, Minute by DWRNS, 31 Mar 1947.

⁹¹ TNA: T 213/305, Interdepartmental Committee on Post-war Pay, Allowances and Pensions, Minutes, 27 Jul 1948.

⁹² TNA: ADM 116/5723, Minute by Dunn, Head of Naval Branch II, 13 Sep 1948 and Minutes of Service Ministers' Meeting, 24 Sep 1948.

⁹³ Ibid, Minutes of Service Ministers' Meeting, 24 Sep 1948.

pay for civilian nurses.⁹⁴ Indeed, due to difficulties in recruiting nurses and their low pay compared with women officers, the Air Council had already expressed a need for nurses' pay to be improved.⁹⁵

Cripps opposed the 80% sought by the Services because this was the ratio used for female non-industrial civil servants. It was taken as being the pay rate which indicated women's work was equal to men's.⁹⁶ The government had accepted the Royal Commission on Equal Pay's findings that men and women should receive equal pay for work of equal value. However, it had deferred action due to the economic crisis. Cripps feared that, when at some unspecified date in the future, a government implemented the equal pay proposal, women in the armed forces would also expect it.⁹⁷ He opposed equal pay for servicewomen, regarding it untenable that they should be paid the same as fighting men because they 'had no liability to engage in personal combat'.⁹⁸

Pay negotiations between the Treasury and Service Ministries revealed anomalies about men's combatant status, with both sides recognising that not all servicemen were 'fighting men'.⁹⁹ For men in support roles, use of weapons was described as a 'contingent liability', something they might be called upon to do in an emergency.¹⁰⁰ Nor had men's pay been directly linked to their relationship to combat roles. In the war, men in technical trades in the army were paid more than men in fighting units, even though they might be employed in repair depots a long way from action. The post-war pay award enabled a 'skilled fighting soldier [to] receive the same pay as a skilled tradesman'.¹⁰¹ However, skilled tradesmen in the RAF continued to be better

⁹⁴ TNA: T 213/489, Pay of the Women's Services, record of discussion between Chancellor and Treasury officials, 6 Aug 1948 and Cripps to Alexander, 8 Sep 48.

⁹⁵ TNA: AIR 6/76, Air Council Conclusions, 30 Apr 1947.

⁹⁶ TNA: T 213/489, Cripps to Alexander, 8 Sep 48.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, Pay of the Women's Services, record of discussion between Chancellor and Treasury officials, 6 Aug 1948. and Cripps to Alexander, 8 Sep 48.

⁹⁹ Ibid, Remuneration of the Permanent Women's Services - Draft Cabinet Paper, Aug 1948. Treasury officials recognised RAF tradesmen as being employed 'behind the fighting line' and Royal Army Pay Corps men as being employed in non-combatant duties.

¹⁰⁰ *Royal Commission on Equal Pay 1944-46 Report*, Cmd. 6937, (London: HMSO, 28 October 1946), p.17. The Commission questioned the 'reality' of this liability. The expression was also used in Albert Alexander's brief for the Cabinet discussion on servicewomen's pay. This distinction between men and women's liability for combat was described as 'purely academic' (TNA: DEFE 7/559, Brief for Minister of Defence, Dec 1948).

¹⁰¹ David French, *Military Identities*, p.314.

paid than its ground combat personnel. Gunners of the RAF Regiment were in the third of four groups for pay purposes.¹⁰² The Treasury argued that men were paid on the basis of the 'majority employment', that is as though they had the same shared risk and responsibility as those in fighting units.¹⁰³ However, Albert Alexander (Minister for Defence) wrote that 'no component of men's pay could be said to relate to combat'.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, women's pay was set on the basis that they did not share men's liability for combat.

Stafford Cripps asked his officials to draw up a special pay scale, with rates for non-commissioned ranks linked to the pay of women in industry.¹⁰⁵ The resulting draft proposal devised rates of pay for junior ranks on what was described as 'a purely arbitrary basis', while those for officers were intended to be lower than the pay of nurses.¹⁰⁶ The gap between women's and men's pay was to widen with increasing rank.¹⁰⁷

The problem that quickly emerged was that by taking industrial pay as a reference point, and so not taking account of marital status as servicemen's pay did, women would be paid as highly as single servicemen. According to Treasury calculations, an unmarried trained private soldier received 42 shillings per week and benefits in kind valued now at 35 shillings. This was less than average semi-skilled male industrial wages of 89 shillings. Starting from the average of 77 shillings and 6 pence per week paid to semi-skilled female industrial workers, and deducting the 35 shillings ascribed to benefits in kind, would give servicewomen pay of 42 shillings and 6 pence per week. This was 6 pence more than a single private's pay. Treasury officials suggested that linking women's pay to industrial wages was impractical. Devising a scheme that would be sufficiently attractive to encourage women to join, and then provide incentives to longer service and promotion, was thought to be too complex. They preferred to re-establish the two-thirds ratio of single men's pay as

¹⁰² Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Careers for Men and Women: His Majesty's Forces*, No. 22, (London: HMSO, 1947).

¹⁰³ TNA: T 213/489, Clough to Padmore, 23 Jul 1948.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, Alexander to Cripps, 22 Oct 1948.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, Pay of the Women's Services, 6 Aug 1948 and Clough to Padmore, 25 Aug 1948.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, Remuneration of the Permanent Women's Services - Draft Cabinet Paper, Aug 1948.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

being simpler to implement and more likely to be acceptable to the Services than a separate pay code for women.¹⁰⁸

Air Commandant Felicity Hanbury regarded the link to men's pay scales as critical. She foresaw that a permanent decoupling of pay would result in battles each time there was an increase for men.¹⁰⁹ Doubting that official Air Ministry channels would be effective in winning over the Treasury, she enlisted help from two sources. First she asked Air Chief Marshal Wilfrid Freeman to write to Stafford Cripps. Knowing Cripps from their time together at the Ministry of Aircraft Production, Freeman reminded him that he had once been in favour of equal pay. He described the argument that women were non-combatants as 'fallacious' as women in the Air Force were '[almost] as combatant as a large portion of the RAF with the sole exception of aircrews.'¹¹⁰

Freeman's approach was rebuffed, so Hanbury also sought help from Caroline Haslett, the head of the Electrical Association for Women.¹¹¹ Haslett was a known contributor on the issue of women's pay, having given evidence to the Royal Commission on Equal Pay on behalf of the British Federation of Business and Professional Women.¹¹² A friend of Lady Cripps, she used this connection to lobby the Chancellor. She urged him to avoid creating an idea of 'women's work' being distinct from 'men's work' and she feared the impact on the recruitment of women into technical trades.¹¹³ Her letter was also politely acknowledged but set aside.¹¹⁴ Undeterred, she used her friendship with Isobel Cripps to go to 11 Downing Street to see Sir Stafford a week before the Cabinet was due to meet on the subject.¹¹⁵ The following day, Cripps wrote on a Treasury file:

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, Clough to Padmore, 25 Aug 1948.

¹⁰⁹ Peake, *Pure Chance*, pp.174-5.

¹¹⁰ TNA: T 213/489, Freeman to Cripps, 29 Sep 1948.

¹¹¹ Caroline Haslett is described as 'never an ardent feminist' but as committed to using 'the possibilities of engineering to raise the whole social status of women'. She founded the Association in 1924. She was prominent in public service. ODNB: Citrine, revised by Eleanor Putnam Symons, 'Haslett, Dame Caroline Harriet (1895-1957)'.

¹¹² *Royal Commission on Equal Pay 1944-46 Report*, Cmd. 6937, (London: HMSO, 28 Oct 1946, Appendix I.

¹¹³ TNA: T 213/489, Haslett to Cripps 20 Oct 1948 and 28 Oct 1948.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, Cripps to 'My Dear Caroline', 25 Oct 1948.

¹¹⁵ Institute of Engineering and Technology [henceforward IET]: NAEST 33/14.3, Haslett to Lady Cripps, 6 Dec 1948.

'After discussion with a number of women I am of the opinion that my pay scales though rational will not be acceptable to the women in the forces and that they would not help recruiting either. For some reason or other the women think it would be derogatory not [original emphasis] to get a proportion of the men's salary! The trouble is that when we get equal pay they will want 5/5 and not 4/5 ... However I have come to the conclusion that I should not persist in the idea of a separate scale for women.'¹¹⁶

Cripps' Cabinet paper set out a case for his special pay scale for women, but suggested that, if this was not accepted, then a ratio of not more than the previously prevailing two-thirds of single men's pay should be set.¹¹⁷ Albert Alexander proposed four-fifths.¹¹⁸ At the meeting, Cripps was supported by George Isaacs (Minister of Labour and National Service), Aneurin Bevan (Minister for Health), Herbert Morrison (Lord President of the Council) and Mr. Woodburn (Secretary of State for Scotland). Their key concerns were size of the pay rise at a time of wage restraint and implications for other women workers if a fixed ratio of women's to men's pay was accepted as a principle.¹¹⁹ When pressed by Clement Attlee, Cripps admitted that, while a special scale would be theoretically better, 'they must have [a] fixed rate because of the emotion aroused on this.'¹²⁰ The Cabinet settled on a compromise rate of 75% of single men's pay.¹²¹ This outcome was justified on the basis of 'the prevailing relationship between men's and women's remuneration in industry; the recruiting situation; and the fact that women are non-combatant'.¹²² On non-combatant status, Albert Alexander was advised that it would be 'unwise to stress this in the House [of Commons]'.¹²³ This may have been intended to avoid discussion on the relationship between men's pay and differing liabilities to engage in fighting.

¹¹⁶ TNA: T 213/490, Handwritten Note on Brief on Pay, Pensions and Retiring Gratuities, initialled by Cripps 3 Dec 1948.

¹¹⁷ TNA: CAB 129/31, Rates of Pay, Pensions and Gratuities for the Permanent Women's Forces, CP(48) 296, 7 Dec 1948.

¹¹⁸ TNA: DEFE 7/559, Cabinet Paper CP(48)295, Minister for Defence, 7 Dec 1948.

¹¹⁹ TNA: CAB 195/6, Sir Norman Brook's Diaries, 9 Dec 1948.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ TNA: CAB 128/13, Cabinet Meeting Conclusions, 9 Dec 1948.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ TNA: T 213/69, Notes to Text of Parliamentary Reply on Pay for Women's Services for Minister of Defence, 14 Dec 1948. This may have been to avoid re-opening debate about appropriate pay rates for 'fighting' men compared with men in support trades that occurred in the 1946 pay negotiations for servicemen.

Pay negotiations can be seen as a victory for the Service Ministries over the Treasury, with the adoption of military rather than civilian terms of service. The result meant that regular servicewomen were to earn more than minimum term national servicemen in 1949. Status as regulars rather than conscripts, with its commitment to longer service, outweighed the customary gender bias for pay.¹²⁴ However, with pay being set as a percentage of that of single men and, therefore, already abated to take account of marital status, a Treasury official observed that pay policy for servicewomen was 'pretty near to applying the principle of unequal pay twice over'.¹²⁵

Pensions

As wartime temporary personnel, women did not serve on terms which attracted pension rights. In new regular service, they would earn pensions. Like pay, this also proved controversial.

Men who served for 22 years or more were paid an immediate pension on retiring. Its value depended on years served and rank attained. Unlike pay, it was not related to marital status. Bachelors received the same pension as married men.¹²⁶ The Treasury regarded pension provision as generous but recognised the need, as many men would be required to retire in their mid-forties, an age when their family responsibilities would be at a peak.¹²⁷ Officials thought also that 'fighting men' might have difficulty finding new jobs as their skills would not necessarily fit them for civilian work.¹²⁸

The Air Ministry again took a robust line, suggesting that the pension rate for women should be 80% of men's.¹²⁹ The War Office and the Admiralty thought this

¹²⁴ TNA: AIR 72/40, Air Ministry Order A.685, 9 Nov 1950, conscripts' pay overtook women's on completion of 18 months service at which point they received the same rate as male regulars.

¹²⁵ TNA: T 213/489, Minute to Sir Edward Bridges, 23 Jul 1948.

¹²⁶ TNA: DEFE 7/559, Minutes of Service Ministers Meeting, 30 Nov 1948.

¹²⁷ TNA: T 213/305, Inter-departmental Committee on Pay, Allowances and Pensions, Minutes, 27 Jul 1948.

¹²⁸ TNA: T 213/489, Retired Pay, Pensions and Gratuities, Post-War Pension Code Paper (48)2, 1948.

¹²⁹ TNA: T 213/305, Inter-departmental Committee on Pay, Allowances and Pensions, Minutes, 27 Jul 1948.

proposal might jeopardise the chance of persuading the Treasury to accept 80% as the pay ratio.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, Service Ministers agreed to put it forward. This time they opted for a fall back of two-thirds of men's rates rather than the 75% they were prepared to accept for pay. This was intended to indicate 'flexibility and responsibility'.¹³¹

Initially, the Treasury considered women's peacetime Services as a short-term experiment. Once the 'glamour' of wartime service had worn off and the 'disabilities' in civilian life had eased, officials doubted that women would 'take kindly to [military service]'.¹³² It described women's pensionable service as 'a most unbusiness like proposition'.¹³³ It wondered whether, rather than retaining individuals on a long-term basis, it would be preferable to 'replace them by a fresh entry'.¹³⁴ However, if a pension was to be offered, women should be obliged to serve for longer than men to earn it as they did not undertake equal work.¹³⁵ Female civil servants, who received pensions at age 60, were seen as the comparator.¹³⁶ The likelihood of women being able to find new employment after retirement was argued both ways. It was thought that women approaching fifty would have difficulty in gaining civilian work. On the other hand, it was argued that, as so many would have been employed in domestic trades, they would find a ready market for their experience.¹³⁷

Stafford Cripps was concerned that setting women's pensions as a fixed percentage of men's would be too generous because all men's pensions were determined on the basis of married men's pay. If a ratio was agreed in principle, then it should be lower than that used for pay so that women would not benefit from the way that men's pensions were calculated.¹³⁸ In Cabinet, he argued that women would be very well

¹³⁰ TNA: ADM 116/5579, Conditions of Service for Regular Women's Services, notes of a meeting, 21 May 1948.

¹³¹ TNA: DEFE 7/559, Brief for Minister of Defence, 29 Nov 1948.

¹³² TNA: T 213/479, Curtis to Sandford, 17 Mar 1947.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid, Notes, 12 Mar 1947 and Curtis to Sandford, 17 Mar 1947.

¹³⁶ Ibid, Curtis to Sandford, 17 Mar 1947.

¹³⁷ TNA: T 213/489, Retired Pay, Pensions and Gratuities for Officers and Other Ranks of the Permanent Women's Services, PWPC(48)2, 1948 and Notes on Revised Scales of Pay for the Permanent Women's Services, 25 Aug 1948.

¹³⁸ TNA: CAB 129/31, Rates of Pay, Pensions and Gratuities for the Permanent Women's Forces, CP(48) 296, 7 Dec 1948.

off on their pensions and this would 'provoke demand for increases for men'.¹³⁹ The idea that women did not have the same family responsibilities as men was common ground at the Cabinet meeting. Accordingly, the Cabinet agreed to set the ratio at two-thirds of men's pensions.¹⁴⁰

Doctors and dentists were an interesting exception. When these professionally qualified women were employed during the war, the British Medical Association and the British Dental Association insisted that they receive the same pay as men.¹⁴¹ This continued to be the case for regular service. The Air Ministry assumed that, as pay was equal, then pensions would be equal.¹⁴² The Treasury proposed that they should be treated like other women in the Services for pension entitlement.¹⁴³ The Air Ministry declined to take the lead in explaining the Treasury position to the professional associations.¹⁴⁴ Treasury officials persisted in the view that 'women doctors are after all women and should be remunerated as such'.¹⁴⁵ In a letter to the Air Ministry, the line was defended on the grounds that conceding pensions payable at the same ratio as pay would undermine the decision to differentiate pay and pension ratios for other women in the Services.¹⁴⁶ When the matter was raised with Sir Stafford Cripps, he suggested to his officials that they should 'gracefully retire on this one!'¹⁴⁷

Career Structure and Training

Women's Royal Air Force

The philosophy of integration of women into the RAF resulted in existing structures for men's careers being adapted for women. On joining, airwomen undertook a five week recruit training course compared with airmen's eight week course. Run by female officers and NCOs, the course had a similar syllabus to the men's with the major omission of small arms training. Its purpose was to develop 'reliability, self

¹³⁹ TNA: CAB 195/6, Sir Norman Brook's Diaries, 9 Dec 1948.

¹⁴⁰ TNA: CAB 128/13, Cabinet Meeting Conclusions, 9 Dec 1948.

¹⁴¹ TNA: T 162/741, Correspondence between Humphrey-Davies and Le Maitre, 17 May 1940 and 21 May 1940.

¹⁴² TNA: T 213/305, Sandford to Padmore, 16 May 1949.

¹⁴³ Ibid, Clough to Wood, 20 Apr 1949.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, Sandford to Clough, 16 May 1949.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, Platt to Padmore, 20 Jul 1949.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, Padmore to Sandford, 26 Sep 1949.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, handwritten note by Chancellor, 19 May 1950.

respect, pride in the Service and team spirit.¹⁴⁸ An airwoman was also to 'be fully aware of ... her added responsibilities as a woman in a predominantly male Service.'¹⁴⁹ On completion, airwomen moved on to trade training where they took courses with airmen.

The Air Ministry decided that airwomen would be eligible for promotion on the same terms as airmen, sitting the same promotion examinations.¹⁵⁰ As they would supervise subordinate men, they would also attend courses which covered the responsibilities of NCO ranks. Courses lasted four weeks and covered leadership, responsibilities of rank and general administration. They could be supplemented by training required for specific trade responsibilities in these more senior ranks.¹⁵¹ With the average time for men to reach corporal being seven years, women were given the opportunity of earlier promotion to fit in with their pattern of four-year engagements. Thus a woman could complete a tour of duty as a corporal within her second stint. This advantage for women was seen as a worthwhile concession as men would still have a better chance of reaching senior NCO ranks.¹⁵²

As with men, candidates for officer training were selected from non-commissioned ranks or directly from civilian life. Officer training lasted twelve weeks and was carried out at the women officers' school at RAF Hawkinge. The course was one week shorter than that for men who were selected for non-flying branches.¹⁵³ Female officers also had to undertake a three week course in administration duties.¹⁵⁴ As with airwomen, training for specialisation was conducted jointly with men. From 1949, female officers could also attend the previously men-only Officers Advanced Training School for the junior officers course.¹⁵⁵

The Air Ministry wanted female junior officers' promotions up to flight officer to be based on time in rank in accordance with existing practice for men. Initially, the

¹⁴⁸ Peake Papers: Box 3, Newsletter to WAAF Officers, No.10, Dec 1948.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ TNA: AIR 19/808, AMO A.77 WRAF – Conditions of Service – Airwomen in the Royal Air Force, 20 Jan 1949.

¹⁵¹ TNA AIR 72/37, AMO A287 WRAF Depot 7/4/49.

¹⁵² TNA: WO 32/13160, Comparative Statement of Draft Schemes, Aug 1947.

¹⁵³ TNA: AIR 72/37, AMO A287 WRAF Depot 7/4/49. Officer training for aircrew was longer.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Peake Papers: Box 3, Newsletter to WAAF Officers, No.10, Dec 1948.

Treasury was opposed, arguing that this implied careers for women when the overall plan for their employment was not clear. Air Ministry views prevailed. Promotion to squadron officer and above was to be competitive with men of the same specialisation, with the requirement based on establishment vacancies.¹⁵⁶ While it would take some years before female officers' length of service and experience compared with men's, this disadvantage gradually diminished in later years.

Career prospects were not as bright as regulations suggested. The key problem was contained in the term 'establishment vacancies'. Establishing authorities could earmark roles as requiring a combatant officer to undertake defence duties additional to the primary task of the job.¹⁵⁷ As women were barred from such duties they were deemed ineligible for these posts. Not only did this limit their immediate promotion prospects by reducing the field of vacancies, it made them uncompetitive beyond that point in their career, as men held the more important jobs in any given rank and they took this advantage into successive promotion competitions. Mr Cannon, of the establishment department of the Air Ministry, argued that 'combatant' designation should only apply to RAF Regiment posts and aircrew. He saw women being sidelined into minor roles in administration of other women, rather than being offered roles suited to their talents. He regarded this as a circumvention of the Air Council's policy of integration.¹⁵⁸ His was an apparently lone voice. Air Commandant Nancy Salmon, who succeeded Felicity Hanbury as Director WRAF in 1950, viewed the limitation as 'a handicap ... foreseen and accepted'.¹⁵⁹ The outcome was effectively a ceiling at the senior officer rank of squadron officer. In subsequent years, promotions to more senior ranks were overwhelmingly in the Secretarial Branch and largely associated with posts in WRAF administration.

Women's Royal Naval Service

As with airwomen's recruit training, women joining the WRNS attended a female recruit training school before going on to specialist training which was done

¹⁵⁶ TNA: T 213/479, Clough to Ottley, Jan 1947 and AIR 19/808, AMO A.76 WRAF – Conditions of Service – Women Officers in the Royal Air Force, 20 Jan 1949.

¹⁵⁷ TNA: AIR 2/13804, Mr. Cannon to DofP(B), 13 Jul 1950.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, Minute DWRAF to DGPI, 7 Feb 1951.

alongside men. The recruit course lasted 4 weeks.¹⁶⁰ Trade training ranged from two weeks for the trade of writer (shorthand) to thirty-five weeks for telegraphists.¹⁶¹ Men's initial training was longer as it also included basic seamanship.

Like the Air Force system, promotion for non-commissioned Wrens adopted the same rules as for the men's service, with the same trade examinations to be passed.¹⁶² A key concern remained the development of NCOs and officers, for it was these women who had the responsibility on stations for the further development of Wrens. While airwomen were required to go through training for NCO rank, Jocelyn Woollcombe failed in attempts to establish such courses for Wrens.¹⁶³

It was the norm for potential officers to be selected from female ratings. Only when there was a shortage were officer candidates to be selected directly from civilian applicants. An exception was made for meteorological officers who were required to have an honours degree in mathematics, physics or geography. They could join on a five year short service commission.¹⁶⁴

Officer training was conducted at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich which mainly housed staff officer and career development training for RN officers.¹⁶⁵ Jocelyn Woollcombe described officer training as lamentably short at only eight weeks.¹⁶⁶ The syllabus was filled to capacity with Service history, office procedures, written and oral communication skills, drill, sport and visits. Evenings included compulsory social events and, perhaps with an eye to the future, time was allowed for a talk on an accomplishment expected of an officer's wife, namely flower arranging. Cadets faced a variety of tests: their capacity for self discipline and self control; their ability to withstand strain; their ability to learn something new; their ability to express themselves coherently through the written and spoken word; and

¹⁶⁰ TNA: INF 13/272, The Royal Navy Needs You in the WRNS, recruiting pamphlet, Aug 1951.

¹⁶¹ TNA: ADM 1/21580, AFO 1125, WRNS Advancement, Apr 1949. The shorthand course was only naval familiarisation training as only skilled women were recruited for this category.

¹⁶² NMRN: 1988.350.1-5, BR 1077, Regulations and Instructions for the WRNS, Appendix – Promotion, 1951 edition.

¹⁶³ NMRN: 1988.350.28.1-4 Senior WRNS Officers' Conference Notes, May 1950.

¹⁶⁴ NMRN: 1988.350.1-5, BR1077 Regulations and Instructions for the WRNS, 1951 edition.

¹⁶⁵ Men's initial officer training took place at Dartmouth. Staff officer training prepared men to work at Headquarters and Service Ministries as well as covering skills needed for senior command appointments.

¹⁶⁶ NMRN: 1988.350.28.1-4, Senior WRNS Officers' Conference Notes, May 1950.

their standard of courtesy and thought for others.¹⁶⁷ In an effort to improve the success rate, ambitious young Wrens were coached by their local female officers. They were guided in written and spoken English and the financial responsibilities of an officer.¹⁶⁸

Commandant Woollcombe had little time for the Air Force's intent to integrate women which seemed to value the role of a specialist above that of administration of the women's Service. She described herself as 'thankful that the Admiralty proposals [took] the opposite view that the ultimate crown of a WRNS officer's "career" [would] only be achieved by success as an Administrative Officer.'¹⁶⁹ She told a conference of her senior officers that there could be no promotion for female specialists beyond the junior officer rank of Second Officer as jobs above that rank were reserved for men. Specialists would have to take up WRNS' administrative work to advance to more senior ranks.¹⁷⁰ Regulations confirmed this situation by stating that chief officers and above and most first officers would be employed in administration.¹⁷¹ Woollcombe's attitude could be seen as limiting the career aspirations of many women officers. However, it reflected the reality that, in the absence of the seagoing experience of their male counterparts, specialists would struggle to compete with men for appointments and promotions. Although WRNS officers' promotions were to be largely an internal matter, the scheme adopted the practice of the Royal Navy relating to time in rank and age. Promotion had to be achieved within certain boundaries of age and experience; failure to achieve the next rank in that window of opportunity resulted in compulsory retirement.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ NMRN: 1988.350.58-9, WRNS Officers – Branches, Recruitment and Entry - Syllabus, circa 1949.

¹⁶⁸ NMRN: 1988.350.28.1-4, Senior WRNS Officers' Conference Notes, May 1950. In 1947 of 57 candidates put forward 40 were promoted; in 1948 26 out of 68 were successful against a requirement for 60-80 annually. Of those recommended in 1949, 3 had been promoted and 1 was still under training. 1949 would appear to have been a particularly poor year. Figures for 1952 were 47 successes from 68 candidates plus 4 women accepted directly for officer rank from a field of 18 applicants (NMRN: 1988.350.58.8, WRNS Officer Corps - Training Pattern, 1952). 75% of candidates for commissions were described as being hampered by an inability to express themselves (NMRN: 1988.350.28.1-4, Senior WRNS Officers' Conference, Mar 1952).

¹⁶⁹ TNA: ADM 116/5579, Minute by DWRNS on Air Ministry Proposals for the Permanent WAAF, 14 Jan 1947.

¹⁷⁰ NMRN: 1988.350.28.1-4, Meeting of Senior WRNS Officers, 9 Nov 1948.

¹⁷¹ NMRN: 1988.350.55, Admiralty Fleet Order 451, 11 Feb 1949.

¹⁷² TNA: ADM 1/21221, Admiralty Fleet Order 451/49 WRNS - Permanent Service - Reports, 11 Feb 1949.

The key difference between the two Services was that women in the RAF apparently had the opportunity to make their careers as specialists. However, non-combatant status was used to exclude women from the best jobs. In the WRNS, the most senior ranks were to be attained in administration of their own Service rather than in wider naval employment.

Conclusion

That regular servicewomen were to be paid less than men is not a surprise. What is interesting is the way in which their terms of service were adapted from those prevailing for wartime auxiliary service and men's regular service, rather than being linked to a civilian pay scale. An attempt by Sir Stafford Cripps to impose nursing or civil service norms was defeated by the united opposition of Service Ministries and the intervention of Air Commandant Felicity Hanbury. Treatment as military personnel was deemed essential. The positive aspect of this outcome was that pay rises for women would automatically occur when they were given to men, without the need for separate negotiations which had taken so long in the post-war establishment of regular service. However, the negative aspect was that the armed forces pay code discriminated between married and single men. As marriage allowance was connected with family responsibilities, which it was assumed women would not share, servicewomen were treated as single. They received a percentage of single men's rates and so earned less than civilian workers whose marital status did not dictate pay. Nevertheless, regular servicewomen were not lowest in the hierarchy. Their longer commitment to the armed forces secured them a position in pay scales above that of national servicemen serving the minimum term.

The primary reason given for not recognising women's work as equal to men's was their non-combatant status. Here the Air Ministry differed from the other Services in that it saw women's contribution as of equal value in principle to that of men. It recognised the limited liability for combat of the majority of its personnel. However, as Chapter 1 showed, the War Office at this time was considering defensive arming of the WRAC. The reason why that proposal was not taken to the Army Board in

1949 has not been traced in the records.¹⁷³ It leaves open the question of what would have happened to pay policy if the War Office had approved arming of women and whether this contributed to the decision not to proceed.

While the armed forces did not impose a marriage bar, personnel policies acted as a deterrent to married service. Regulations were brought about by a mixture of what the Directors thought prudent, the adaptation of men's regulations, expectations of behaviour in the Services and norms of society at that time. Terms and conditions of service, which were hardly helpful to married personnel of either sex, were even less so for women. They went beyond the norms of British society and reflected the Services' cultures and career patterns. Directors of the Women's Services saw regular service as implying the acceptance of mobile rather than local service, including overseas postings which had been mostly voluntary during the war. Reflecting the values of the times, they surrendered the possibility of women with young children serving as they had in the war. With barriers to married service having been erected, this would be a career opportunity only for those prepared to remain single or, if married, childless, as predicted by Jocelyn Woollcombe.

Career structures were also influenced by organisational factors. The Directors serving in the late 1940s had both joined their respective Services in 1939 and had been enculturated accordingly. They could each see the merits of the systems within which they worked and they developed the regular women's Services accordingly. WRAF general service training mimicked that of the RAF with its initial recruit course, NCO and SNCO rank courses and officer training course. If women were to compete with men for promotion and were to supervise men in the workplace, they needed equivalent leadership and management training to the men's. The WRNS were not expected to undertake the same responsibilities as men and were unable in these early years to establish the same suite of courses as the RN enjoyed. The Navy's gendered division of work influenced the promotion prospects which quickly narrowed down to those within the Directorate. The WRAF held out the promise of a more meritocratic approach. However, this ideal was compromised by the opaque

¹⁷³ FOI Fleet: Employment of Women in Combat, Brief for Minister for the Armed Forces, 1 Dec 1989.

procedures for establishing appointments as requiring combatant status.

Nevertheless, assuming a woman chose to stay for enough years, gained experience and was successful in training courses, a path to senior ranks was open outside the Directorate.

The power bases of the women's Directorates were markedly different and derived from their Services' organisation. An entity in its own right, the WRNS inculcated a strong, gendered identity through training and close control over women's careers. This apparent strength masked vulnerability to being disbanded as a cost saving measure. However, for Commandant Woolcombe, it had the advantage that women would speak about issues affecting women rather than it falling to male policy-makers as could happen in the other Service Ministries.¹⁷⁴ For the WRAF Directorate, these transitional years were predicted to be the height of its influence as it was observed that the logical conclusion of the policy of integration would be that 'the responsibilities of DWRAF in the post-war Air Force should become progressively less, rather than increased'.¹⁷⁵ While integration led to a weak identity as a women's Service, it was counter-balanced by its more solid foundation as a necessary part of the RAF. The strong and gendered WRNS identity and the weaker WRAF identity were less a function of the women themselves than of their place in the larger organisations. In Part II we will see how the two Services developed from these starting points.

¹⁷⁴ Mason, *Britannia's Daughters*, p.101. Commandant Woolcombe described how she was the only woman at a meeting between Service Ministries and the Treasury on introducing pensions.

¹⁷⁵ TNA: AIR 2/11882, Memorandum on Rank & Status of Director WRAF – undated and unsigned but circa 1949 in a debate on the job title for the Head of the WRAF.

Part II:
Developments in Integration 1950s - 1980s

Chapter 3: Servicewomen in the Period of Men's National Service: Failing to Resolve the Conflict between Careers and Marriage

Speaking at the Association of Wrens' Annual Meeting in May 1947, former WRNS Director Vera Laughton Mathews said:

'We know that the decision to keep the WRNS as a permanent Service was due very largely to the man-power situation in the country, but that will not be so for ever, and the future of the WRNS depends very much on the account that those now serving give of themselves. They must make themselves essential to the Navy.'¹

Mathews emphasised the publicly stated reason for the creation of regular service for women, namely lessening the need for men. However, this overlooked two important aims in the paper that went to the Defence Committee of the Cabinet in May 1946. First, there was to be a core of women in the armed forces to provide a nucleus around which expansion could take place in national emergency. Second, there would be reserve forces from which those reinforcements would be drawn.²

David French explained how expectations of the nature of a future major war changed in the early 1950s as the Soviet Union demonstrated its nuclear weapons' capability. He noted that military planners assumed that, if deterrence failed, a major war would start with an exchange of nuclear weapons and that the UK would be a main target for such an attack. Accordingly, 'by 1955 British planners assumed that [a global war] would be nasty, brutish, very short, and that it would have to be fought with forces in being because there would be no time to mobilise and despatch reserves'.³ Duncan Sandys' defence White Paper of April 1957 proposed significant changes to the armed forces to reflect 'these scientific advances [that] fundamentally alter[ed] the whole basis of military planning'.⁴ Sandys set out proposals for male regular forces of 375,000 to be supported by civilian staff and contractors. He announced that conscription was to end. The last intake was planned for 1960, with

¹ From a speech at the Association of Wrens Annual Meeting, May 1947 (NMRN: 1988.350.18.5, *The Wren*, No.177, Oct 1947).

² TNA: CAB 131/2, Cabinet Defence Committee paper DO(46)63, 8 May 1946.

³ French, *Army, Empire, and Cold War*, p.156.

⁴ *Defence: Outline of Future Policy*, Cmnd.124, (London: HMSO, April 1957).

an expectation that the last national serviceman would leave by the end of 1962. Reserve forces would be earmarked for home defence duties rather than as reinforcements to be deployed to continental Europe. Women's Services were not mentioned.⁵

If there was less need for men, less reliance on reserves and no time to expand the armed forces in the event of major war, what purpose was now served by women's Services? Had women made themselves essential as urged by Commandant Mathews?

This chapter evaluates the extent to which original policy targets for the women's Services were met. It argues that creating a core for future expansion was initially most important, while 'lessening the need for men' was a useful justification for public consumption rather than a numerical reality. However, in considering the implications of women's terms and conditions of service, this chapter reveals the conflict between the idea of long-term military careers for women and prevailing attitudes towards marriage. David French identified the needs of married servicemen as a key problem for the army at the time, but one which authorities attempted to address.⁶ What emerges here is the failure of policy-makers and senior female officers to grapple not only with societal trends in relation to marriage and child-bearing, but also regulations that made married service for women problematic. Despite difficulties in retaining female personnel, women's Services survived even when the need for men was dramatically reduced from 1957. This chapter suggests that airwomen had made themselves essential to the RAF. However, the existence of the WRNS is seen to be more precarious.

Early Years: 1949 - 1957

Initial Policy Targets

Given economic crises causing budget uncertainties, the developing confrontation with communist states affecting requirements for personnel and the complex task of re-organising the armed forces after the war, it is unsurprising that the Service Ministries lacked clarity on how many women would form the regular core. The

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ French, *Military Identities*, pp.317-9.

Cabinet paper of 1946 proposed a WRAF of at least 8,000 women to be economically viable. The Admiralty suggested the WRNS should be 2-3,000 strong, but potentially as many as 5-6,000. The War Office wanted 3,000 women but would take more if its budget allowed.⁷ By December 1948, the planned figures were much higher. A brief for Albert Alexander (Minister of Defence) quoted target strengths of 26,000 for the WRAF, 7,500 for the WRNS and 18,000 for the WRAC.⁸ Achievement fell well short of these ambitious targets. However, judging by 1946 aspirations, Service Ministries succeeded in creating core women's Services in the 1950s (Table 3.1).

The vulnerability of the WRNS as a shore-based, civilian-in-uniform organisation was evident immediately. A major study on the size and shape of the armed forces recommended disbanding it.⁹ Too many women were employed in administering women (800 out of a strength of about 7,000). The study argued that, as the RN was not short of male volunteers, Wrens could be replaced by regular servicemen. These would be more flexible in the jobs they could do and would serve on average for longer. It went on to say that this was not the case in the other Services which would have to replace women with men serving even shorter periods (i.e. national servicemen).¹⁰ The report was published in February 1949, the same month as regular service for women commenced. As a consequence, the Admiralty Board dismissed the suggestion of dispensing with the WRNS as politically unthinkable. In addition, such a move would lead to an increase in the proportion of men ashore, contrary to the Board's current policy.¹¹

Reserve forces customarily comprised male civilian volunteers who undertook military training in their spare time in return for a bounty, and former servicemen whose terms of engagement could include a period on the reserve. The latter now included national servicemen. However, reserve liability was not included in non-commissioned women's terms of regular service, so female reservist forces had to be

⁷ TNA: CAB 131/2, Cabinet Defence Committee paper DO(46)63, 8 May 1946.

⁸ TNA: DEFE 7/559, Brief for Minister of Defence for Cabinet meeting on 9 Dec 1948.

⁹ TNA: DEFE 7/592, Report of Inter-Service Working Party on Size and Shape of the Armed Forces, 28 Feb 1949 (Harwood Report).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ TNA: ADM 167/132, Board Minutes, 12 Apr 1949.

almost entirely civilian-based.¹² At a meeting in the Admiralty in 1947, it was assumed that a WRNS Reserve should be about 80% of the strength of its active Service.¹³ While there was a recruitment campaign, the WRNS reserve matched this target (Table 3.2). Numbers fell away in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Air Ministry decided to accept reservist women into any trade for which training could be provided, without limit on numbers.¹⁴ However, a brief flurry of interest in the early 1950s was not sustained. The number of female reserves became insignificant (Table 3.2).

Throughout the period of men's national service, the claim that regular service for women would lessen the need for men was weak. The first major test of personnel policy came in 1950 with the outbreak of the Korean War and perceptions of an increased threat to British interests in Europe and the Middle East from the Soviet Union. In response, and with a view to encouraging European allies to do more for defence, the government increased men's national service from eighteen months to two years.¹⁵ Consequently, the number of men in the armed forces rose from 666,000 in 1950 to 848,000 in 1952. There was no corresponding increase in employment of servicewomen (Table 3.1). Over the period 1949-57, only 2.7% of the intake to the armed forces was female (Table 3.3). The strength of women's Services declined from 30,700 (4% of the armed forces) to 12,500 (1.9%) (Table 3.1).

¹² TNA: AIR 19/808, Air Ministry Order, A77, Women's Royal Air Force - Conditions of Service for Airwomen in the Royal Air Force, 20 Jan 1949 and WO 32/13160, Comparative Statement of Draft Schemes, circulated with minute dated 16 Aug 1947. Women were to be given the opportunity to join the Reserves but would not be compelled.

¹³ TNA: ADM 116/5579, Notes of a Meeting to Discuss Conditions of Service for the WAAF, undated but circa Jul 1947.

¹⁴ TNA: AIR 2/1158, Future Policy for Ground Branches and Trades in the RAF Volunteer Reserve, May 1952.

¹⁵ L. V. Scott, *Conscription and the Attlee Government: The Politics and Policy of National Service 1945-51* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp.257-8.

Table 3.1 Strength of the Women's Services 1949-62

	Thousands													
	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
WRNS	6.4	5.4	4.9	4.6	4.7	4.5	4.1	3.5	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.1	2.9	3.0
WRAF	14.5	10.1	9.4	10.0	9.5	8.6	6.8	5.4	4.7	4.3	4.9	5.3	5.6	6.6
WRAC	9.8	6.4	6.1	6.3	7.1	6.8	5.8	4.7	4.4	4.1	4.6	4.6	4.7	5.4
Women - Total	30.7	21.9	20.4	20.9	21.3	19.9	16.7	13.6	12.5	11.7	12.8	13.0	13.2	15.0
Men - all Services Personnel - Total	737.4	666.0	804.0	848.4	841.3	816.1	783.5	745.2	687.1	600.1	550.1	503.3	458.4	424.8
Women as % of Personnel	4.0	3.2	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.4	2.1	1.8	1.9	1.9	2.3	2.5	2.8	3.4

Annual Abstract of Statistics, No.93, (London: HMSO, 1956), Tables 136 and 137 and No. 103, (London: HMSO, 1966), Tables 134 and 135.

Table 3.2 Women in Reserve Forces 1949-62

	Thousands													
	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
Navy	-	-	-	0.6	4.1	3.8	3.6	3.3	3.0	2.6	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.0
As % of Regulars				13	87	84	88	94	88	79	42	45	45	33
Air Force	1.6	2.7	3.4	3.4	3.3	2.8	2.4	2.0	1.6	1.3	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.5
As % of Regulars	11	27	36	34	35	33	35	37	34	30	18	15	11	8
Army	7.7	11.8	12.0	11.1	11.0	10.1	7.4	6.0	5.4	5.8	6.6	7.1	5.8	5.3
As % of Regulars	79	184	197	176	155	149	128	128	123	141	143	154	123	98
Women Reserves - Total	9.3	14.5	15.4	15.1	18.4	16.7	13.4	11.3	10.0	9.7	8.9	9.3	7.7	6.8
Men in Reserves	206.5	220.9	280.7	429.1	610.8	800.3	865.4	904.8	883.7	882.3	839.1	770.1	642.6	540.5
Reserves - Total	215.8	235.4	296.1	444.2	629.2	817.0	878.8	916.1	893.7	892.0	848.0	779.4	650.3	547.3
Women as % of Total	4.3	6.2	5.2	3.4	2.9	2.0	1.5	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.2

Annual Abstract of Statistics, No.93, (London: HMSO, 1956), Tables 136 and 137 and No. 103, (London: HMSO, 1966), Tables 134 and 135.

Table 3.3 Intake to the Armed Forces 1949-62

	Thousands													
	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
WRNS	2.0	1.4	1.6	1.4	1.6	1.5	0.8	0.8	1.1	1.1	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.0
WRAF	3.7	3.0	3.9	3.4	2.7	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.5	2.3	1.9	2.5	3.0
WRAC	2.1	2.4	1.9	3.0	3.7	2.6	1.5	1.9	1.5	2.0	2.1	2.0	2.4	2.8
Women - Total	7.8	6.8	7.4	7.8	8.0	5.9	3.7	4.1	3.8	4.6	5.2	4.7	5.7	6.8
Male Intake	215.8	234.7	246.5	266.6	238.0	221.1	217.4	230.9	154.3	144.1	113.9	101.2	51.0	56.3
Total Intake	223.6	241.5	253.9	274.4	246.0	227.0	221.1	235.0	158.1	148.7	119.1	105.9	56.7	63.1
Women as % of Total Intake	3.5	2.8	2.9	2.8	3.3	2.6	1.7	1.7	2.4	3.1	4.4	4.4	10.1	10.8

Annual Abstract of Statistics, No.93, (London: HMSO, 1966), Tables 136 and 137 and No.103, (London: HMSO, 1956), Tables 134 and 135.

Recruiting and Retaining Regular Servicewomen: Why Policy Targets Were Missed

Planning for annual intakes of women depended not only on how many jobs they could fill but on how long they would stay. Shorter service by early leavers (for example failures in training, exercising the right to leave on marriage or dismissal on pregnancy) was expected to be compensated by a proportion of women signing on for longer than the initial four year term. War Office planning figures from 1945 proposed an annual intake of 750 to support a women's Corps of 3-3,300 regulars (intake of 22.7% to 25% of strength). It was assumed that just over a third of women would be on long engagements.¹⁶ Admiralty figures were 2,000 female recruits to sustain a WRNS of 9,000. At 22.2% (intake: strength) this was close to the army's assumption.¹⁷ The Air Ministry planned an intake of 5,000 to support a strength of 26,000 women, giving a more optimistic intake: strength ratio of 19.2%.¹⁸ Applying the range of intake assumptions (19.2% - 25%) to the 1948 aspiration for 51,500 servicewomen, the Services would require annual intakes of about 10-13,000 women.

¹⁶ TNA: WO 32/13160, Future of the Women's Services, Minute by Director ATS, Mar 1945, Future of the Women's Services, 11 May 1945, Provision of a Permanent Regular Women's Service, 11 Aug 1945.

¹⁷ Ibid, Comparative Statement of Draft Schemes, circulated with minute dated 16 Aug 1947.

¹⁸ Ibid.

In 1948, a government survey of recruiting concluded that the public was not convinced of the usefulness of the armed forces compared with mining, export industries and land work.¹⁹ This was not a surprising finding given the government's efforts to re-invigorate the economy in 1947 under the banner of 'The Battle for Output'.²⁰ To appeal to potential recruits, it was proposed that emphasis should be placed on self-interest rather than patriotic duty. Men were said to want to learn a trade which would fit them for a higher status job when they returned to civilian life. Women apparently expected travel and adventure rather than career opportunities. The lifestyle, with its frequent moves and separation from family and friends, was seen as incompatible with family life.²¹

The survey included a section on women's opinions. Of women questioned about women serving in the armed forces, 18% thought it was a good life, while 40% declined to give an opinion due to lack of knowledge. From the data, the researcher estimated that between 4% and 6% of young women could be interested in joining the Services.²² If the figures were accurate, this would provide a field of about 12-18,000 potential new candidates per annum.²³ As not all candidates would prove suitable, this would have made it difficult to sustain the high level of recruitment demanded by the 1948 targets. However, the outflow of trained women was nearly 40% and this figure implied a recruitment target of 20,000 women per annum to achieve a strength of 51,500. This was unsustainable and there was a net loss of women nearly every year. Given the high rate of leaving, volunteering in the 1950s was only sufficient to sustain forces at the lower end of figures proposed in 1946 (Tables 3.1 and 3.3).

The Central Office of Information was responsible for publicity for the Services' recruiting campaigns. Advised by a policy committee which included servicemen and civilians from the Service Ministries, it placed advertisements in national and local press, including magazines. Advertisements were keen to portray images of

¹⁹ TNA: RG 23/145, Recruitment to the Services, Report No 2, Aug 1948, fieldwork conducted spring 1948.

²⁰ *The Battle for Output: Economic Survey for 1947*, Cmd. 7046, (London: HMSO, 1947).

²¹ TNA: RG 23/145, Recruitment to the Services, Report No 2, Aug 1948.

²² Ibid.

²³ There were more than 300,000 females in each year group for ages 15-19 and 20-24 (*Annual Abstract of Statistics*, No.93, (London: HMSO, 1956), Table 8). Taking one year group and an assumed 4-6% interest, this gave a new recruiting field of 12-18,000 candidates.

modernity and femininity, as well as highlighting new career opportunities. However, campaigns could be constrained by other priorities. For example, in 1948 the Services Recruiting Policy Committee decided to ban the use of posters aimed at women in the north-west of England as a protective measure for the textile industry.²⁴

Early examples of advertisements for the WRNS used the strap line 'You'll like the life in the WRNS'.²⁵ The glamour of the Service and its members was emphasised. An example from 1952 pictured a young, attractive woman, with styled hair showing under her cap and a modicum of make-up, suggesting the retention of femininity while serving with the Royal Navy (Figure 3.1). Although the age on entry was 18 to 28, not uncommonly, the advertisement was pitched to 'girls'. No educational qualifications were demanded. It was personal attributes of character and ambition that were called for from potential recruits.²⁶

WRAF recruiting contained more information on the work and career prospects than the Navy campaign. Posters and advertisements included the strap line 'Join the WRAF and give your ambition wings' (Figure 3.2). Women's integration within the RAF, working with men, and the prospect of holding rank senior to men, were to the fore, alongside an appeal to lifestyle choice.²⁷ Depictions of airwomen included work scenes as well as leisure. As with the Navy, they were always attractive, smart and feminine. By 1950, advertisements adopted the word 'women' to replace 'girls' and they made an appeal to discard the limitations of civilian life as well as emphasising attractions of the Service. Women were urged to 'seize life's opportunities' and 'achieve financial independence' rather than 'sit still and watch life pass you by' or 'stay tied to anyone's apron strings'.²⁸ A 1951 advertisement depicted a WRAF sergeant working alongside male colleagues in an operations room and out-ranking one of them (Figure 3.3).

²⁴ TNA: INF 12/72, meeting 48(6), Jul 1948.

²⁵ TNA: INF 2/89, Advertisements 1952-3 campaign.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Under the pressure of budgets, the Air Ministry ran a joint advertisement for RAF and WRAF in 1949. TNA: INF 2/67, Advertisement, 1949.

²⁸ TNA: INF 2/75, Advertisements 1947-1951.

**Serve with the
ROYAL NAVY
in the
W.R.N.S.**



Girls of character and ambition will take happily to life with the Royal Navy. The Women's Royal Naval Service offers them a worthwhile career, opportunities for foreign travel and generous leave and pay. They will work for and with the Royal Navy, and have a wide range of interesting jobs to choose from.

Here are some of the jobs for which young women between 18 and 28 can apply:—Writer (Pay); Writer (General); Stores Assistant; Sick Berth Attendant; Telegraphist; Steward; Radio Mechanic; Cook.

WRITE TODAY to the Director, W.R.N.S., Dept. —, Admiralty, S.W.1, for an illustrated booklet containing full details.

You'll like life in the **W.R.N.S.**

W. 1

Figure 3.1 WRNS Press Advertisement circa 1952. (TNA: INF 2/89)



Figure 3.2 WRAF Recruiting Poster 1949. (TNA: INF 2/75)

**There's a place
for YOU ...**



In the W.R.A.F. you have no living expenses; food, accommodation, uniform, etc., are free. Your pay is all spending money.

...in the W.R.A.F.

YOUR DESIRE FOR COMPANIONSHIP; for the adventure of overseas travel; for financial independence — all these match exactly the Royal Air Force's urgent need for young, keen and ambitious women to take on important and rewarding work. Send the coupon now for leaflet describing the benefits — and obligations — of life in the W.R.A.F.

THE W.R.A.F. (D.R.28) VICTORY HOUSE, KINGSWAY, LONDON, W.14
Please send booklet about life in the W.R.A.F. to:
(Applicants from British Isles only)

NAME (Mrs. or Miss) _____
ADDRESS _____

(If in W.A.F. you may require for 2 or 4 years)



7304/318/31 5½ x 3½ Nats. & Prov. 1053 Final proof 28 March 74,425

Figure 3.3 - Advertisement (1951): WRAF Sergeant Working with RAF Sergeant and Corporal. (TNA: INF 2/75)

To supplement advertisements, more detailed information was available through the Ministry of Labour and National Service's pamphlets on 'Careers for Men and Women'. The armed forces booklet was first published in 1947 when understanding of the shape of the permanent women's Services was emerging. Sections dealing with opportunities for men and boys were extensive, detailing educational standards required, training and career prospects, as well as terms and conditions of service. The WRNS was dealt with in two pages giving minimal information on terms and conditions and a list of possible trades. In contrast, what could be called a recruitment pitch was made for potential airwomen. It described the WRAF as 'the women's division of the RAF' and called it 'A new peacetime profession ... open to women'.²⁹ Foremost in the list of advantages was training for a good job, as well as the appeal to the customary list of travel, sport, education and comradeship.³⁰

An analysis of WRAF recruiting in 1949 showed that the average age of a new recruit was just over 19. There were significant regional variations in the rate of volunteering, with proportionately fewest recruits being drawn from Scotland, Wales and the English regions of the midlands and the north-west.³¹ A 1951 survey indicated that only a small proportion had good qualifications. The majority were from working class backgrounds and had left school at an average age of 14 years and 8 months. All 123 in the survey were single. Typically, they had had three civilian jobs before enlisting: factory work (32%), clerical jobs (23%), shop work (12%) or domestic trades (11%). Most had at least one hobby classified as active, such as sport or dancing.³²

Despite apparently positive attitudes towards careers for women, limitations were revealed in an Air Ministry pamphlet aimed at parents. Taking a 'frequently asked questions' approach, this fascinating booklet urged the need to consider a daughter's career with the same care as a son's. However, ambition appeared to be secondary to traditional expectations as revealed in a question on promotion. The scene was set with a remark which might be posed by parents. It read: 'In the event of our

²⁹ Ministry of Labour & National Service, *Careers for Men and Women No. 22: His Majesty's Forces*, (London: HMSO, 1947), WRNS pp 20-21, WRAF pp.60-63 & 67.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ TNA: AIR 77/421, Report on WRAF Recruiting, Jan 1950.

³² TNA: AIR 32/400, Characteristics of WRAF Recruits, Jul 1951.

daughter not marrying, we understand that she can make the WRAF her career.'³³ Career prospects were presented as a fall back should the primary aspiration of marriage not be achieved. Nor was there any expectation of combining marriage and career.

Serving if married was difficult, at a time when marriage at an earlier age was a trend in British society. The critical age category for the armed forces was 20-24 as women were mostly under 20 years old on joining and signed on for four-year engagements. Census returns from 1951 and 1961 show that in this age group, the percentage of women describing themselves as married rose from 46.5% to 56.4%. Corresponding statistics for the age group 25-34 rose from 78.8% in 1951 to 85% in 1961.³⁴ In addition, according to David Coleman, the median interval between marriage and birth of a child was in the order of 19 - 20 months.³⁵ So even if a woman had stayed in the Services after marriage, there was a strong likelihood that she would leave within two years to have a child.

Policies on postings appeared to cater for personnel with serving spouses. In the WRNS, married women could serve at the same establishment as their husbands provided there was no great disparity in rank between them and their work did not bring them into contact with each other. Otherwise, 'every endeavour' would be made to post a married woman near her husband.³⁶ However, this was not guaranteed as the needs of the Service came first. Women had to apply to their commanding officer for permission to live off-base with their husbands.³⁷ In the RAF, if both husband and wife were in the Services, it was at the commanding officer's discretion as to whether they could serve at the same station. If one was an officer and the other non-commissioned, they were barred from serving together.³⁸ In addition, not all stations had WRAF sections, so collocation was not always possible. These regulations were drawn up on an assumption that married personnel working together was to be avoided. There were also social complexities.

³³ TNA: AIR 19/808, WRAF Policy, Booklet 'Your daughter and the WRAF'. Undated. However, the RAF crest bears the King's Crown not the Queen's thus it pre-dates 1952.

³⁴ *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, No.103, (London: HMSO, 1966), Table 13.

³⁵ David Coleman, 'Population and Family', in A.H. Halsey and Josephine Webb (eds.), *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p.43.

³⁶ NMRN: 1988.350.1-5, BR1077 Regulations and Instructions for the WRNS, 1951.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ TNA: AIR 10/5614, Queen's Regulations 334 and 564, 1956.

Attendance at a mess or club was determined by rank not marital status. For non-commissioned ranks, a wife holding junior rank was often unwelcome at events in a Senior NCOs' mess. Likewise, attendance of junior ranks in officers' messes was problematic.³⁹

Implementation of regulations on collocation was obstructed by practical difficulties. In the 1950s, a lack of married quarters was compounded by the shortage of civilian accommodation. This led to couples being separated.⁴⁰ As all servicewomen were deemed to be single irrespective of their actual marital status, women were not eligible to take up tenancies of married quarters.⁴¹ Women married to civilians had to trust to civilian housing. A woman married to a serviceman had to rely on quarters being available where he worked, assuming that the couple had postings with the necessary proximity.

There was also a degree of ambivalence towards posting of married women. In the WRNS, the idea of making concessions to married women was not universally welcomed. The senior female officer at Plymouth Command headquarters complained that married Wrens ignored their commitment to being mobile, demanding the right to be posted to suit their marital circumstances. If they were dissatisfied they '[made] threats of desertion and sometimes of correspondence with their M.P.s.'⁴² Concessions, if made, were 'largely at the expense of the single girls.'⁴³ The author wanted Wrens to be obliged to resign on marriage as was the case in the Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service. Failing that, she proposed 'powers of greater discouragement to those contemplating remaining in the Service on marriage.'⁴⁴

The RAF appeared to be sympathetic in principle, but constrained in practice. A 1959 report on WRAF commissioning policy suggested that it would be helpful if married women were 'afforded a reasonable chance of being posted with or near

³⁹ TNA: DEFE 71/50, Posting of Married Airwomen, 26 Jan 1977. Entry to messes was still determined by rank.

⁴⁰ *Report of the Advisory Committee on Recruiting*, Cmnd.545, (London: HMSO, October 1958), p.15.

⁴¹ TNA: AIR 10/5614, Queen's Regulation 1719, 1956.

⁴² NMRN: 1988.350.28.5, Letter to Director WRNS, 20 Jul 1960.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

their husbands'.⁴⁵ It noted arrangements were made for some married women to be collocated 'but these cases [were] the exception rather than the rule, and involve[d] many informal negotiations'.⁴⁶ There was reluctance to advertise such a mechanism, as collocation could not be guaranteed. Nevertheless, the Officers and Aircrew Manning Committee decided that discreet reference could be made to the process and that requests would be considered.⁴⁷

Attitudes, regulations and societal trends combined to make retention of women in the armed forces difficult. The engagement structure of successive four-year contracts also contributed to higher than planned rates of leaving. Women had to make a positive decision to re-engage for further periods; the default position was to leave. Some snapshot data is available. Figures for the WRNS in 1951 indicated that 14.5% of the WRNS had completed their period of service and left. A further 25% left early due to marriage, pregnancy, on compassionate grounds or deserted.⁴⁸ A 1957 paper for the Air Council noted that about one-third of the WRAF left each year.⁴⁹

Transition to All-Regular Forces

Duncan Sandys' Defence White Paper, April 1957

The Defence White Paper of April 1957 set out the proposed size and purpose of men's forces and stated that civilian staff and contractors would be needed to support them. It failed to mention women's Services. An article by the defence correspondent of the *Daily Express* promptly claimed that a defence committee had considered 'Proposals for the reduction and eventual abolition of the Wrens, Wracs and Wraf (sic)'.⁵⁰ It went on to ask if women performed essential tasks, or whether men or civilians could do them instead. It concluded that as 'vast reductions in manpower' were planned it was unlikely that women's Services would survive.⁵¹ The

⁴⁵ TNA: AIR 2/15707, WRAF Recruiting Advisory Panel, 1(59), 10 Dec 1959.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, Minutes of OAMC Working Party, 24 Feb 1960. This committee was not responsible for non-commissioned ranks. The extent of collocation for airwomen was unlikely to be better than for officers as fewer RAF stations accepted non-commissioned women.

⁴⁸ NMRN: 1988.350.28.1-4, Conference of Senior WRNS officers March 1952, Manning State.

⁴⁹ TNA: AIR 19/808, Proposed Policy and Conditions of Service for an Immobile Section of the WRAF, 25 Jul 1957.

⁵⁰ *Daily Express*, 9 Apr 1957, p.7.

⁵¹ Ibid.

question of the purpose of women in the armed forces was taken up by Miss Joan Vickers, M.P. (Conservative, Plymouth - Devonport). She claimed 'The use of women in the Services [was] extravagant' and they could be replaced by civilians.⁵²

Speculation had some justification. In March 1957, a brief provided for Sandys suggested that the women's Services were 'only worthwhile so long as it remain[ed] difficult or impossible to recruit enough male regulars.'⁵³ It went on to say that women were slightly cheaper to employ than men, but if this changed 'There would be no advantage in continuing to employ women in the Services as a matter of deliberate choice.'⁵⁴ However, it suggested that as the RAF and army did not expect to recruit enough men of sufficient quality, their women's Services would still be needed. In addition, women did work which was unpopular with men and women were better than men in other (unspecified) jobs. Disbanding the WRNS had apparently been discussed within the Admiralty on a 'number of occasions' and there was scope for 'doing away with women in the Royal Navy apart from nurses'.⁵⁵

The Admiralty's position on the future size of the Navy focussed on two options: adult male strength of either 75,000 or 80,000. In addition to these figures, it could have boys under training, locally employed personnel and women. A paper which explored how to reduce to 75,000 adult men suggested that the WRNS was not economic. It would be 'more satisfactory' to be allowed more men.⁵⁶ However, the paper, which went to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, argued for 80,000 adult men plus a WRNS of 3,000.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, disbanding the WRNS was one of several measures listed as potential cuts which might be needed. Other measures investigated, and vigorously rejected, included disbanding the Royal Marines or the Fleet Air Arm.⁵⁸ These measures may have been little more than the Admiralty making a point about its difficulty in reducing to the proposed size. So well did it make its case about its greater ability to recruit men than the army or RAF, that it

⁵² HC Deb, 5th Ser., Vol.568, Col.2007, 17 Apr 1957.

⁵³ TNA: DEFE 7/1918, H.L. Lawrence Wilson to Newling, 14 Mar 1957.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ TNA: ADM 1/27371, Long Term Defence Policy - the 75 Fleet, paper for Vice Chief of Naval Staff, 17 Feb 1957.

⁵⁷ Ibid, First Thoughts on the Nature and Effect of the '80 Fleet', circulated 22 Feb 1957.

⁵⁸ TNA: DEFE 7/1177, Defence Expenditure 1956 - Memorandum by the Admiralty, 10 Oct 1956.

was allowed to aim for a target of 88,000 men as long as it took over a share of the other Services' commitments.⁵⁹

Far from disbanding women's Services, the mood in the Service Ministries was to avoid taking additional risks in re-shaping the armed forces through having to find enough male volunteers to replace women as well as ending conscription.⁶⁰ George Ward, Secretary of State for Air, and Julian Amery at the War Office made 'reassuring statements about the WRAF and the WRAC during the Estimates Debates [but] the Admiralty ... remained silent'.⁶¹ This was put down to there being less need for the WRNS.⁶² It is not clear why the Admiralty delayed joining public proclamations about the continuing need for women's Services, as a briefing note to commanding officers on the White Paper made explicit that the WRNS, boy entrants and locally employed personnel were additional to the 80,000 strong Navy.⁶³

The continuing need for women in all-regular forces was formally agreed at the Service Ministers' Committee in July 1957. Faced with uncertainties about reverting to all-regular forces, commitments were made to increase the number of servicewomen. The number of Wrens was to rise by 1,000, the WRAC by 50% over five years, and the WRAF from 5,000 to 10,000.⁶⁴ Duncan Sandys proposed reducing costs by creating a single women's Defence Force whose members would work with any of the Services.⁶⁵ This idea was immediately rejected on the grounds that it would be disastrous for recruiting.⁶⁶ It was seen as 'essential to *esprit de corps* [original emphasis] that women should feel themselves an integral part of their own Service'.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ Ibid, Mountbatten to Minister of Defence, 27 Mar 1957 and DEFE 13/237, Sandys to Sir Richard Powell, 12 Apr 1957.

⁶⁰ TNA: DEFE 7/1918, H.L. Lawrence Wilson to Newling, 11 Apr 1957.

⁶¹ Ibid, H.L. Lawrence Wilson to Chilver, 28 May 1957.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ TNA: ADM 205/114, Additional Questions and Answers Information in Response to the Defence White Paper, 18 Apr 1957.

⁶⁴ TNA: DEFE 10/354, Interim Report of the Ministerial Committee on Recruiting, 10 Jul 1957 and Minutes DM/M(57)8, 11 Jul 1957.

⁶⁵ TNA: AIR 19/808, Stormont (MOD) to Orr-Ewing (Air Min), 15 Jul 1957.

⁶⁶ Ibid, letter from Orr-Ewing, 18 Jul 1957 and Christopher Soames to Lord Mancroft, 19 Jul 1957.

⁶⁷ TNA: DEFE 10/354, Further Interim Report of Ministerial Committee on Recruiting, DM/P(57)16, taken at Defence Ministers Committee on 25 Jul 1957.

Attitudes to Servicewomen as Revealed by Pay Policy

The Air Ministry argued that its ambitious plan to double the size of the WRAF was dependent on securing better pay for women. It resurrected arguments it had made in 1954 when equal pay for non-industrial civil servants and teachers was announced. At the time, it proposed that women be paid the same as single men on the grounds that they were interchangeable and their work was of equal value to the RAF. Both Air Chief Marshal Dickson (Chief of the Air Staff) and Sir James Barnes (Permanent under Secretary) supported the case. However, Lord De L'Isle (Secretary of State for Air) made the point that equality would have to extend to terms of service, in particular the 'special arrangements affecting marriage'.⁶⁸ This echoed the Treasury's view that the right to resign on marriage, added to lack of liability for weapons training, meant that women should not qualify for equal pay.⁶⁹ Neither the War Office nor the Admiralty agreed with the Air Ministry. The former repeated the previous argument that men in non-fighting jobs could serve in support of active units and would be obliged to fight as a last resort. The WRAC did not share this liability and were barred from units serving close to potential battle areas. The Admiralty view was that Wrens did not do equal work as they did not go to sea. However, it did concede that it might be harder to make a distinction between men and women's roles in the RAF. Even so, it noted that airmen were trained to use weapons whereas airwomen were not.⁷⁰

Air Chief Marshal Boothman, Commander-in-Chief Coastal Command, raised the pay issue again in 1955. He repeated the argument that the civilian case for paying women less than men was usually based on men's family responsibilities. However, he pointed out that armed forces' pay already made a distinction between single and married men through the payment of marriage allowance. He thought that women did the same work as men, the same additional duties and shared the same promotion rosters. He believed that the RAF should press for women to receive the same pay as single men to counter recruiting difficulties, even if the other Services did not agree.⁷¹ The Air Ministry went as far as to draft a paper for the Service

⁶⁸ TNA: AIR 2/12605, Minute Sheet, 19 Nov 1954, 30 Nov 1954 and 22 Dec 1954.

⁶⁹ TNA: T 213/490, minute dated 27 May 1954.

⁷⁰ TNA: AIR 2/12605, Turner (War Office) to Parker (MOD), 12 Jan 1955, Lang (Admiralty) to Parker, 6 Jan 1955.

⁷¹ Ibid, Air Chief Marshal Boothman to Under Secretary of State (Air), 20 May 1955.

Ministers' Committee. However, it was left on file, to be held until 'a suitable occasion'.⁷² When expansion of women's Services was agreed in July 1957, the Air Ministry was again keenest to improve women's terms of service and again not fully supported. However, Service Ministers agreed to seek a pay rise to 85% of single men's rates. This was negotiated successfully with the Treasury.⁷³

Recruitment and Retention for All-Regular Forces

Success of the reversion to all-regular forces was critically dependent on recruiting and retaining volunteers, male and female. A paper for Service Ministers by the Defence Administration Committee claimed that recruiting trends meant that the army and RAF '[would] not be merely somewhat under strength' but '[would] be completely unable to carry out their tasks' when national service ended.⁷⁴ A committee was established to investigate recruiting in December 1957 under the chairmanship of Sir James Grigg.⁷⁵ Dame Felicity Peake (formerly Hanbury) also joined the committee. Grigg's report, published in October 1958, was surprisingly confident that the Services could attract enough men to sustain all-regular forces. It envisaged an annual entry into non-commissioned ranks of 42,000 men over the period 1958-62 to cover the loss of conscripts, reducing to 34,000 per annum once national service ended.⁷⁶ However, it suggested that improvements should be made to nearly all aspects of personnel policies and career structures.

The Committee criticised recruiting policies and career progression. It noted a failure to target sufficient boys at the ages at which they left education, and lack of opportunities for boys leaving grammar schools with 'O' levels.⁷⁷ Career progression in non-commissioned ranks was described as hampered by inappropriate promotion examinations. For officers, career structures that resulted in them leaving the

⁷² Ibid, Note to File, 27 Jul 1955.

⁷³ TNA: DEFE 7/559, Service Ministers' Meeting - Minutes, 16 Oct 1957; *Report of the Advisory Committee on Recruiting*, Cmnd.545, (London: HMSO, October 1958), p.45.

⁷⁴ TNA: DEFE 10/354, Recruiting - Report by Defence Administration Committee, 26 Sep 1957. Similar concerns about recruiting also in DEFE 7/1918, H.L. Lawrence Wilson to Newling, 14 Mar 1957. David French quoted the Adjutant General as predicting that the army would recruit only 20,000 per annum against a target of 25,500. French, *Army, Empire, and Cold War*, p176.

⁷⁵ Grigg was formerly permanent under secretary at the War Office and he was appointed as Secretary of State for War in 1942.

⁷⁶ *Report of the Advisory Committee on Recruiting*, Cmnd.545, (London: HMSO, October 1958), Appendix A, [henceforward Grigg Report].

⁷⁷ Ibid, pp.32-3.

Services in their late forties or early fifties were also seen as deterring men who were concerned about finding civilian employment at that age.

Chief amongst the recommendations for men were better pension provision, simplified allowances, reductions in 'fatigue' and guard duties, fewer petty restrictions on off-duty time, and more stability for family life, with less separation and more accompanied service.⁷⁸ The condition of married and single accommodation was condemned as 'nothing short of scandalous'.⁷⁹ In a visit to RAF Abingdon, Felicity Peake observed successful use of caravans as married quarters. Young married couples found them acceptable and cheap, but problems arose from lack of space if there were children.⁸⁰

Grigg's report described women's Services as being 'accepted without question, since ... no large organisation should carry out its obligations by relying solely upon men.'⁸¹ It went on to say that any criticism of the Services should '[not] spring from the fact that they employ women in peace-time, but from the feeling that they do not employ enough ... there [were] still far too many men operating telephone switchboards and driving staff cars.'⁸² It criticized a 'lack of emphasis on the need for Women's Services', blaming the White Paper for 'quite erroneously [creating] an impression that women were no longer wanted'.⁸³

In its analysis of the state of women's Services, Grigg's committee covered much the same ground as for men. However, it dismissed the need for equal pay, concluding that 'women in the Forces [were] well off financially as compared with those outside' and that equal pay 'would [not] markedly affect the rates of recruitment'.⁸⁴ It suggested reducing the minimum age by six months since the 'responsibility of looking after a girl of 17½ [was] no less than that of looking after a girl of 17'.⁸⁵ There was no discussion of allowing girls to join at 15 for apprentice training as was open to boys. There was a clear expectation that girls should be treated differently

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp.49-54.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.53.

⁸⁰ Peake Papers: Grigg Committee, notes on visit to RAF Abingdon, 1 Apr [1958].

⁸¹ Grigg Report, p.44.

⁸² Ibid, p.44.

⁸³ Ibid, p.44.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.45.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.46.

and that re-assuring parents, headmistresses and career mistresses about levels of supervision of girls living away from home was paramount.⁸⁶

The crucial difference between men and women's terms of service was women's right to leave on marriage, resulting in a 'high proportion of women not complet[ing] their engagements'.⁸⁷ The report supported the right to leave, describing marriage as 'fully as important a social duty as a career in the Women's Services'.⁸⁸ However, having identified marriage as the key reason for the inability to retain women, it made no recommendations about making married service easier. Rather, it proposed to improve allowances and pension rights to ameliorate the financial impact of leaving early and making terms and conditions of service sufficiently attractive to generate better recruitment.

Grigg's key idea was a radical change from fixed-term engagements for women to open-ended terms. After serving a minimum of two or three years, chosen as the period over which the initial cost of uniforms and training would be amortized, women would serve until retirement age with the right to give six months notice to leave.⁸⁹ The government rejected this proposal on the grounds that it would have an 'adverse effect on morale and manpower planning'.⁹⁰

As with men's recruiting, Grigg was confident that the Services could find the 5-6,000 female recruits it would need annually.⁹¹ Indeed, this proved to be so. Between 1959 and 1962, female intakes averaged 5,300 per annum (Table 3.3). However, rather than increasing the WRNS, numbers declined by about 300. The WRAC increased by 800, but at 17% this fell well short of the aspiration of a 50% increase. The WRAF saw the greatest increase (an extra 1,700 women), but at 6,600 it too missed its ambitious target of 10,000 members (Table 3.1). It is not possible to say conclusively why women were not joining, though Irene Hilton of the Women's Employment Federation suggested that 'Practically all young girls hope[d] to marry

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.49.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.46.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.47.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.46.

⁹⁰ *Recruiting: Government Comments on Report of the Advisory Committee on Recruiting* (Cmnd.545), Cmnd.570, (London: HMSO, November 1958). 'Manpower' intended men and women.

⁹¹ Grigg Report, p.49.

early and this affect[ed] their attitude towards long term training or long term projects of any kind' [original emphasis]. She observed that 'The long contract to-day has no advantages to the young ... The feeling of being tied, on the other hand, weighs heavily.'⁹² However, it is evident that marriage and pregnancy remained the most common reasons for leaving early and the desired build up of the women's Services proved unattainable.

In 1958, the RAF decided to follow the army's example and try a local service scheme for airwomen. This abandoned the principle that women must accept 'mobile' service, that is a commitment to serve wherever sent. It was hoped that, by avoiding the necessity of living away from home, it would encourage more women to join, married women as well as single. It had the additional benefit of saving costs by not having to provide barrack accommodation. Local service women would be eligible only for trades with comparatively short training. The initial target was for up to 1,000 women to join on two-year engagements. In an evaluation in September 1960, quality was deemed a success but numbers disappointing. Only 445 posts had been filled. Recruitment had dropped from 56 per month to 12 per month and there were fears about the likelihood of women extending beyond their initial commitment.⁹³ The scheme was retained as overheads were low.⁹⁴ However, it did not fulfil its intentions. Statistics for March 1962 recorded only 456 local servicewomen against a potential establishment of 1,134.⁹⁵

By May 1962, the short period served by airwomen was seen as an advantage. Air Marshal Sir Walter Cheshire (Air Member for Personnel) reported to the Air Council that the need for personnel in ground trades was set to decline between April 1963 and April 1965. Meanwhile, he planned to increase the combined maximum size of regular and local service WRAF from 6,500 to 6,800 as a means of filling trades that were then short of men or for which women were more suitable. As women served on average for only 2 - 3 years, any surplus would quickly

⁹² Peake Papers: Grigg Committee, Folder 'Part VI - Women's Services', Hilton to Peake, 20 Jun 1958.

⁹³ TNA: AIR 6/129, Progress and Problems of the WRAF Local Service Scheme, Air Council Paper AC(60)48, 9 Sep 60.

⁹⁴ TNA: AIR 2/15789, Extract from Air Council Conclusions, 5 Oct 1960.

⁹⁵ Ibid, Normal and Local Service - WRAF Future Policy, discussed at Ground Trades Manning Committee, 26 Apr 1962.

disappear as a subsequent cut in recruiting targets would 'soon [be] reflected in serving strength'.⁹⁶ It seems that women had become a useful means of regulating the overall strength of the RAF through natural wastage.

Developments in the Women's Services

WRAF Integration

Integration of the WRAF officers into RAF career patterns continued in the 1950s and early 1960s. The women's separate officer training school at RAF Hawkinge was closed and in 1962 training was collocated with male officer training at RAF Jurby on the Isle of Man.⁹⁷ Staff College places for female officers were approved in principle by 1950.⁹⁸ This was an important development because it opened up more jobs at Headquarters and Defence Ministries for women. However, candidates had to pass preliminary staff training and few women qualified. Of the eight women who took the examination in 1952 only two passed. A further two passed in 1953.⁹⁹ From those qualified, Squadron Officers Martin and Borlase were the first selected to attend the College in Andover in 1953.¹⁰⁰ Squadron Officer Martin went on to become the first woman to achieve the rank of air commodore in competition with RAF officers.¹⁰¹ To the dismay of Jean Conan Doyle (Director WRAF, 1963-6), Squadron Officer Borlase became engaged to a fellow student on the course, married and left the Service in 1954.¹⁰² Borlase's departure so soon after completing this prestigious course may have fuelled belief that investing in women's training was poor value for money.

⁹⁶ TNA: AIR 6/132, Air Council Paper (62)16, 25 May 1962.

⁹⁷ Air Commodore R. M. B. Montague, 'Women in the RAF', in Tony Ross (ed.), *75 Eventful Years: A Tribute to the Royal Air Force* (London: Lockturn, 1993), p.226. Jurby was used for male officer candidates who did not qualify for the elite cadetship at RAF College Cranwell. Women continued to train in separate flights from men. Training was fully integrated in 1979 when all initial officer training moved to Cranwell.

⁹⁸ Peake Papers: Box 3, Minutes of WRAF Officers' Conference, 12 May 1950.

⁹⁹ TNA: AIR 2/11084, Notes for the Fifth Bi-annual Meeting of Senior WRAF Officers, 2 Oct 1953.

¹⁰⁰ British Library Sound Archive [henceforward BLSA]: C465/03/06 (F1894), Air Commandant Jean Conan Doyle, interviewed by Cathy Courtney, 24 Jul 1991. The officers were named in K. B. Beaman, *Partners in Blue: the Story of Women's Service with the Royal Air Force* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p.246.

¹⁰¹ BLSA: C465/03/06 (F1894), Air Commandant Jean Conan Doyle, interviewed by Cathy Courtney, 24 Jul 1991.

¹⁰² Ibid and *Air Force List*, (London: HMSO, 1954 and 1955 editions).

Airwomen's career opportunities were also developing. They had a wider range of postings than those open to other women's Services, though this was not always straightforward. For example, though they were initially employed with the Second Tactical Air Force in Germany, in 1952 the Air Council decided to disestablish these posts for women. This was on the grounds that its war role was mobile, so living conditions were 'primitive and arduous ... [and] women would be an embarrassment to which a Commander should not be subject.'¹⁰³ In 1955, this policy was reversed. Restricting the deployment of women was described as 'outmoded by the nuclear concept'.¹⁰⁴ Although Air Marshal Sir Francis Fogarty's note did not expand on this point, it appeared to mean an expectation of rapid escalation of hostilities to nuclear war with the Soviet Union. If that were the case, concerns about living conditions in the field would be unimportant. The Air Council agreed that airwomen could be employed in 'forward units' as radio operators and in signals jobs.¹⁰⁵

A proposal from Technical Training Command in 1963 not only to collocate junior ranks' recruit training but to integrate it, came to nothing. Air Commandant Jean Conan Doyle was thought to oppose the move as 'efficiency and morale would suffer if [men and women] were trained in the same place.'¹⁰⁶ This seems an odd stance as initial officer training had been collocated the previous year and trade training courses, which followed on from junior ranks' recruit training, was already combined. Conan Doyle may have been safeguarding a rare senior post for female officers as commander of the WRAF Recruit Training School.

Meanwhile the role of the WRAF Directorate was shrinking from its 1940s peak of influence. Following an audit of its personnel and functions, the number of female staff jobs at the Air Ministry and the headquarters of the various RAF Commands was reduced.¹⁰⁷ In addition, the Air Secretary's Department, which was responsible for posting personnel to jobs, decided that the WRAF Directorate would not automatically have a place on boards selecting female officers for posts. The Director would be 'consulted ... before Board meetings' and could be invited 'when

¹⁰³ TNA: AIR 19/808, Air Member for Personnel to Under Secretary of State, 25 Nov 1955.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ TNA: AIR 2/16595, Future Location of the WRAF Depot, 29 Oct 1963.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: T 213/288, 1957 Inspection Report on the WRAF Directorate, 30 Oct 1957.

special WRAF considerations [arose]'.¹⁰⁸ This change reduced the Director's influence over WRAF officers' careers.

WRAF Aircrew - Air Quartermasters

A major step for non-commissioned women's opportunities came with the opening of some air quartermaster (AQM) posts.¹⁰⁹ AQM was not a formally established trade. The work was carried out by airmen from other trades who volunteered for temporary flying duty. Work included responsibility for loading and unloading freight from cargo flights or acting as stewards for passenger flights. These men had lower status than those in aircrew trades and branches. They received a supplement known as 'crew pay' rather than the more generous 'flying pay' awarded to aircrew and they did not wear a flying badge which would have proclaimed their status.¹¹⁰

Air Commandant Hanbury first sought to establish airwomen as stewards in 1946. Although she seemed to have support from Air Commodore Staton (Air Officer Commanding Number 46 Group, Transport Command) nothing came of her initiative.¹¹¹ The idea was revived in 1957 at a meeting to discuss the implications of new transport aircraft coming into service, particularly the passenger-carrying Comet. The number of AQMs needed would increase at a time when 'there was an urgent problem to attract sufficient volunteers of a high quality'.¹¹² Volunteers had to be NCOs. It was observed that, by that stage, men tended to be married and were reluctant to volunteer because of the amount of time spent away from home.¹¹³ However, the new aircraft were seen as providing an opportunity to create two specialisations within AQM work: one for freight and one for passenger flights. Women's suitability for work on freight-carrying aircraft was dismissed on grounds of lack of strength, but they could be employed on Comets in the passenger role. It

¹⁰⁸ TNA: AIR 2/13804, Minute, Air Vice Marshal Heath to DWRAF, 12 Apr 1957.

¹⁰⁹ The trade was later re-named air loadmaster.

¹¹⁰ Crew members received a pay supplement for flying as distinct from flying pay which was payable as an addition to pay whether the person was on flying duties or not. Flying badges are more commonly known as brevets.

¹¹¹ Peake Papers: Box 2, Hanbury to Staton, 14 Nov 1946, 19 Feb 1947, 3 May 1947 and 11 Jun 1947.

¹¹² TNA: AIR 2/15813, Minutes of a meeting to consider the recruitment of AQMs, 8 Oct 1957.

¹¹³ Ibid.

was agreed to seek eight female volunteers for passenger aircraft duty on a trial basis, provided accommodation could be found for them.¹¹⁴

The 1957 decision did not solve problems with AQM work. The Officer and Aircrew Manning Committee proposed that it should become a trade with dedicated personnel and aircrew status rather than relying on temporary volunteers.¹¹⁵ Such a move would also bring about aircrew status for female AQMs. Wing Commander Dutt of the Manning Branch protested that 'surely it [was] not intended to give women aircrew status?'¹¹⁶ He went on to say that if women became aircrew there was a problem because the Selection Centre did not have female accommodation nor were the selection exercises suitable for women.¹¹⁷ However, the Committee saw no objection to this small number of women being designated as aircrew. In February 1961 the Air Council passed the proposal that 25 women be employed in the role out of a planned complement of 310.¹¹⁸ Treasury approval for aircrew status and pay for AQMs was sought. However, it insisted on delay until the next review of Service pay because a pay freeze was in force.¹¹⁹ The Treasury also queried the award of aircrew status and pay for women because they would only serve on passenger aircraft.¹²⁰ However, aircrew status, badges and pay were finally approved in 1962.¹²¹ By February 1963 there were fifteen female AQM aircrew.¹²²

WRNS Consolidation

Dame Nancy Robertson (Director WRNS, 1954-58) described her objective as being 'to consolidate the permanent Service and to ensure that there was a worthwhile career open to ambitious and well-qualified girls.'¹²³ Her successor, Dame Elizabeth Hoyer Millar, described the difficulty of sustaining enough posts for Wrens. As bases closed in the 1950s, she said the 'problem was to find them billets [i.e. jobs] in

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ TNA: AIR 2/15707, Status and Conditions of Service of Air Quartermasters, Sep 1960.

¹¹⁶ TNA: AIR 2/15501, Dutt (Manning 3) to Director of Manning 1, 19 May 1960. 'Manning' here means a personnel branch not just 'men'.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ TNA: AIR 6/131 Air Council Meeting 4(61) Conclusions, Paper AC(61)12 – New Conditions of Service for Air Quartermasters, 23 Feb 1961.

¹¹⁹ TNA: AIR 2/15501, handwritten note, 4 Oct 1961.

¹²⁰ TNA: AIR 2/16376, Head of S10(Air) to AUS(P)(Air), referring back to 1961, 3 May 1965

¹²¹ TNA: AIR 2/16320, Flying Duties as AQMs – Air Ministry Pamphlet 96B, Sep 1962 (1st edition May 1962).

¹²² TNA: AIR 2/15789, DWRAF to DGPS, WRAF Shortage of NCOs, 18 Feb 1963.

¹²³ Quoted in Mason, *Britannia's Daughters*, pp.101-2.

order to keep the strength going to what was the ceiling we were allowed, and below which would have been uneconomic.'¹²⁴ Cuts in the Fleet Air Arm hit the WRNS particularly, as at the start of regular service 2,600 Wrens (approximately 40%) were employed on Naval air stations.¹²⁵ Malta was the main opportunity for overseas postings at this time. Periodically, Wrens would spend time at NATO Headquarters.¹²⁶ First Officer Joan Cole was given the interesting post of assisting the Women's Royal Australian Navy to start up again, having been disbanded after the war. She held the role of its Director from November 1954.¹²⁷

Conclusion

The decision to end national service for men was perhaps an opportunity to terminate the employment of servicewomen. The concept of women's Services being cores for expansion had no place in the April 1957 White Paper. However, reverting to all-regular forces was expected to put a strain on male recruitment. Although the Admiralty may have considered disbanding the WRNS as a savings measure, women's Services were seen as a means of mitigating the risk of shortfalls in male volunteers. With the demise of national service, women formed the shortest serving component of the personnel mix. From the perspective of the MOD's 'manpower' planning division, 'there [were] few jobs for which women [were] absolutely essential' and numbers required depended on 'progress in recruiting men and in civilianisation.'¹²⁸ As national service came to an end, the allowable number of airwomen was seen as a new, cheap way of regulating the strength of the RAF as establishments continued to decline.

Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, failure to retain servicewomen undermined the public basis for the policy that they would lessen the need for men. Women's early return to civilian life was attributable to marriage and pregnancy. This coupled social norms of women marrying at a younger average age than in pre-war times with the regulatory climate in the Services. In 1964, in response to a

¹²⁴ Ibid, p.102.

¹²⁵ NMRN: 1988.350.18.12, *The Wren*, No.184, Jul 1949.

¹²⁶ Fletcher, *The WRNS*, p.98 and pp.101-3.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p.100.

¹²⁸ Peake Papers: Grigg Committee, Folder 'Part VI - Women's Services', minute to Mr Shearer, 18 Mar 1958. 'Civilianisation' here may have meant the employment of either civil servants or using contractors.

question about steps being taken to retain servicewomen, Christopher Mayhew (Minister for the Navy) described marriage as 'a great bugbear [taking] our people away'.¹²⁹ Yet means of lessening its impact were not sought. From recruiting literature suggesting careers as a fallback in the absence of marriage, through to an official inquiry into recruitment which described marriage as a social duty for women, and on to regulations which made married service difficult, there was a sense that long-term military careers were not natural for women.

Attitudes towards and employment of the WRNS and the WRAF diverged. The Admiralty continued to be ambivalent about the purpose of the WRNS. What the Directors' WRNS of the time described as 'consolidation' was more a case of retaining a foothold. The Air Ministry was more committed to making good use of servicewomen. As seen in the debate about equal (single personnel) pay, it perceived women's contribution to ground-based work as of the same value as men's. Its philosophy of integration of the WRAF made progress. Airwomen were accepted for work on the RAF's Cold War frontline – the Second Tactical Air Force, stationed in West Germany. Air quartermasters became the first regular servicewomen to gain aircrew status. Female officers had access to top level training at Staff College, opening the way to wider employment. The next chapter deals with further developments in the RAF.

¹²⁹ HC Deb, 5th Ser., Vol.703, Col.28, 30 Nov 1964.

Chapter 4: The Women's Royal Air Force to the Early 1980s: the Growing Influence of Legislation

In 1978, after three years' consideration of the impact of recent legislation in the MOD, a paper for the Principal Personnel Officers' Committee advised that:

'... where the circumstances of their service are the same, men and women ... should be treated equally. To seek to do less ... might lead to a charge that MOD was sheltering behind the exemption clauses contained in recent legislation. This ... might lead to pressure for absolute equality (including the full range of military duties) which has been in evidence in other areas both at home and abroad in recent years.'¹

In approving the paper's recommendations, the Committee agreed that publicity for new policies would not be sought on the grounds that 'measures taken to ensure equality of treatment in conditions of service may draw attention to the restrictions placed upon the employment of women in combat and other related roles'.²

The Committee was concerned about three major pieces of legislation affecting women's employment: the Equal Pay Act (1970) which came into force in 1975, the Employment Protection Act (1975) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). The first required employers to pay staff equally for work of equal value. The second, *inter alia*, enshrined working women's entitlement to paid maternity leave. The Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) had two main features: clauses concerning employment and those covering provision of education, goods, facilities, services and premises. The armed forces were exempt from the SDA and the Employment Protection Act. A caveat in the Equal Pay Act enabled the MOD to continue to pay servicewomen less than men on the grounds that their work, being non-combatant, was not equivalent to men's.

¹ TNA: DEFE 10/1250, Sex Equality in the Armed Forces, Sep 1978. This was a joint Services committee. Membership included the senior personnel officers: Second Sea Lord for the RN, Adjutant General for the army and Air Member for Personnel for the RAF.

² Ibid and DEFE 10/1249, PPO Minutes, 15 Nov 1978.

Not only was employment policy in the armed forces lagging developments in Britain, but the Committee was also informed that it was increasingly divergent from that of NATO allies. A summary of the situation noted that, of the NATO nations that employed servicewomen, all but the UK, Turkey and West Germany trained them to use weapons.³ Only Norway had the same policy as Britain in allowing women to leave on marriage. However, Britain was alone in not permitting servicewomen to rent married quarters and receive associated allowances.⁴

American policy had changed significantly in the 1970s as it reverted to all-volunteer forces and coped with challenges to policies brought by servicewomen using equality legislation. Women lost the right to leave on marriage, gained maternity leave benefits and started to be employed in flying in all the Services, seafaring in the Coast Guard and subsequently in the US Navy.⁵ However, by limiting posts open to women, these new roles continued to be described as non-combatant.⁶

The dilemma facing the Principal Personnel Officers' Committee was how to adjust to developments in employment legislation, abiding by the spirit of new laws, without surrendering the guiding principle that women should not be employed in combat. Concentrating on developments in the RAF to the mid-1980s, this chapter addresses why and how legislation affected MOD policy, despite exemptions. It identifies significant advances in WRAF employment brought about by new equality awareness and fears for implications for the RAF's image if it did not modernise its approach. It reveals uncertainty about what constituted 'combat roles' in the RAF and argues that the introduction of small arms training made airwomen as combatant as their male counterparts. As in the USA, combat discourse found ways of delineating between men's combatant status and women's. While some employment restrictions were removed, the barriers to long-service careers created by policies on marriage and pregnancy persisted. This chapter seeks to explain why policy-makers

³ TNA: DEFE 10/1250, Sex Equality in the Armed Forces, Sep 1978. Portugal, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg and Iceland did not employ servicewomen. The paper noted that Belgium had only recently started to include women and their status was not covered. West Germany only employed women as medics.

⁴ Ibid. The Dutch were in the process of removing the right to leave on marriage.

⁵ Major General Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: an Unfinished Revolution* (Novato, Ca: Presidio, 1992 edition), pp.289-304, 317-21 and p.333.

⁶ Ibid, pp.337-45.

reacted against developments in America that permitted women to combine military careers and motherhood. It argues that senior women officers were particularly resistant to change, believing that motherhood was incompatible with military service. Without support from female leaders, this was not an issue that male policy-makers were likely to tackle.

Legislation

Sex Discrimination Act (1975)

The Ministry of Defence was accustomed to exemption from legislation which might affect personnel's rights on the grounds that military work was different from civilian.⁷ It required little effort to gain exemption from the SDA. The Ministry sent a paper on roles of servicewomen to the chairman of the House of Lords committee overseeing the legislation.⁸ It set out its case against extending women's employment on the basis of the short period of women's service compared with men's, public opinion being against women in combat roles, the harsh nature of field conditions, women's lack of physical strength, cost inefficiency and assumed problems in maintaining morale and discipline in combat units if women were present. The key point was that combat was men's work not women's.⁹ The paper made insufficient distinction between the Services and, with an emphasis on field deployments, presented an army-centric position. It did not appear to do justice to the integrated pattern of employment in the RAF as it described all servicewomen, including the WRAF, as 'solely employed in separate women's Services'.¹⁰ The committee accepted the MOD's argument and the armed forces were exempted.¹¹

In July 1975, Mr Stevens, a senior Air Force Department civil servant responsible for advising on terms and conditions of service, thought it prudent to 'look around

⁷ For example, it was exempt from the Sexual Offences Act (1967) which legalised homosexual acts between consenting adults (Parliamentary Archive [henceforward PA]: HL/PO/PU/4/193, Sexual Offences Act 1967, clause 1(5)). Also, under Section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act (1947), service personnel could not sue for accidental injuries. (TNA: DEFE 10/1250, Section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act, PPO 58/78, 17 Jul 1978).

⁸ PA: ROY 1/3, House of Lords Select Committee, Anti-Discrimination (No 2) Bill, memorandum by the Ministry of Defence, circa 1972. The paper was not signed or dated.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ PA: HL/PO/PU/4/212, Sex Discrimination Act 1975, clause 85.

for the loose ends of the Sex Discrimination Bill'.¹² He had two concerns. First, the *Daily Mirror* was interested in MOD policies following the introduction of maternity rights in the USA's armed forces. Second, the MOD was unprepared for the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, passed in 1974 and coming into force on 1 July 1975.¹³ It was only realised in March that there was no exemption. Recruiting procedures had to be hastily changed to comply.¹⁴ Stevens thought exemption from pending sex discrimination law might not apply to education, goods, facilities, services and premises provisions. He wanted 'at least the makings of an MOD position ... in case there was press coverage for sex discrimination in the services'.¹⁵ In a second letter, Stevens urged policy departments to 'identify those areas where there [was] discrimination and satisfy [themselves] that it [was] justified'.¹⁶ The criterion was whether a minister could reasonably be expected to defend the situation.¹⁷ Thus the tone of staff work was akin to a stock-take. Stevens' letter did not suggest taking action to change discriminatory practices, but perhaps this was implied by the proposed ministerial test.

Work revealed differences in the treatment of men and women, sometimes in favour of women but more frequently to the advantage of men. Men were employed in more roles, were better paid, accrued better pensions and received more generous allowances. The number of women who could be recruited was limited. However, women had the advantage in being able to leave more easily, including the right to leave citing marriage.¹⁸ Airwomen were not required to transfer to the Reserve on completion of regular service.¹⁹

A case that arose in the Navy Department in late 1977 illustrated the unfairness of the regulations on married quarters and the different approaches taken in the Services. A Second Officer in the WRNS was married to a former lieutenant

¹² TNA: DEFE 71/309, S10 to staff, 9 Jul 1975.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ TNA: DEFE 71/24, Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, DPM1(RAF), 18 Mar 1975, S10(Air), 23 Apr 1975 and 19 May 1975.

¹⁵ TNA: DEFE 71/309, S10 to staff, 9 Jul 1975.

¹⁶ Ibid, S10 to Air Force Department, 3 Nov 1975.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Women married before joining were not entitled to leave under these regulations unless they could prove material change of circumstances. Single women had no preferential right to leave.

¹⁹ TNA: DEFE 71/309, S10 to Air Force Department, 3 Nov 1975 and S10 to DS14, Mar 1976.

commander who, having retired from the Royal Navy, was unemployed. She applied to rent a married quarter on posting to the Naval Headquarters at Northwood. Although none were available at Northwood, there was unoccupied accommodation at Hendon that would suffice. As an exception to the regulations, the naval authorities proposed allowing the officer to take a quarter because her husband was 'to some measure dependant on her'.²⁰ They wanted to charge her the same rent as a male officer, on the understanding that if it was needed for an 'entitled' family, she would have to vacate.²¹ The Air Force department was intending to go further. It wanted to make it a matter of routine to offer surplus married quarters to women at the standard rent.²² However, finance staff in the army department argued that the Second Officer should be charged either the rent levied on 'irregular' occupants or the market rent set for those MOD civilians who were permitted to take a quarter.²³ Both of these solutions would result in the officer paying about 50% more in rent than a married male officer.²⁴

Mr F J Stevens (of the army finance staff, not to be confused with Mr T M P Stevens of the Air Force department) wanted policy on married quarters to be decided by the Principal Personnel Officers' Committee and not changed by 'erosion' brought about by particular cases. He supported the proposal to charge the higher rent.²⁵ The Assistant under Secretary Naval Personnel weighed in with a short, dismissive reply to Mr Stevens, admitting that there were two views of the matter, but that Stevens' view was held 'by a minority of one'.²⁶ Air Vice Marshal Bailey (Director General Personnel Services) concurred, suggesting to Stevens that he was 'swimming against the tide' and that it was unacceptable to charge a higher rent because the officer was female.²⁷

Although out of step with his opposite numbers on this case, as F J Stevens wished, policy on allowing women to rent quarters was addressed by the Principal Personnel

²⁰ TNA: DEFE 70/24, Mr Howell (Head of Naval Personnel Division 2), 30 Nov 1977.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, Mr F J Stevens, Head of F4 (Army Department), 24 Nov 1977 and Air Vice Marshal Bailey to Stevens, 13 Dec 1977.

²³ Ibid, F4 (AD), 10 Nov 1977, 17 Nov 1977 and 21 Nov 1977.

²⁴ Ibid, Mr Howell (Head of Naval Personnel Division 2), 30 Nov 1977.

²⁵ Ibid, Mr F J Stevens, 24 Nov 1977.

²⁶ Ibid, AUS NP, 2 Dec 1977.

²⁷ Ibid, Bailey to F J Stevens, 13 Dec 1977.

Officers' Committee as a result of the work started by his namesake. It took three years for the Services to agree their position on equality legislation for the Committee.

Mr Jaffray (Deputy under Secretary Personnel and Logistics) put the paper to the Committee. His aspiration was to avoid the MOD 'com[ing] under pressure to widen employment opportunities for women to a far greater extent than the Service boards would wish to go at this stage.'²⁸ He cited two principles to justify differential treatment. First, social mores were thought to exclude women from combat duties. Second, a married woman was described as not warranting the same assistance as a married man who had to provide for his family. Jaffray reported advice from the Treasury Solicitor that the latter had been eroded by changes in public attitudes and that a woman could be regarded in law as head of her household. On combat duties, he acknowledged that most of those NATO countries with women in their forces trained them in the use of personal weapons. However, he considered that excluding British servicewomen from combat roles remained valid, pointing out that it had been used to justify exemption from the Sex Discrimination Act. He quoted the House of Lords Select Committee opinion that ' "for many positions in the Armed Services the male sex is a genuine occupational requirement".'²⁹ This was simply the Select Committee echoing back the MOD's own sentiment. It was not an independent assessment.

In November 1978 the Committee approved Mr Jaffray's recommendations for a few alterations to women's terms and conditions of service, some raised to the standard applied to men and two reduced to those of men. Most improvements related to married women. They were granted the right to rent married quarters and their allowances were also brought in line with those of married men.³⁰

²⁸ TNA: DEFE 10/1250, Sex Equality in the Armed Forces, Sep 1978.

²⁹ Ibid, Annex C.

³⁰ Ibid and DEFE 10/1249, PPO Minutes, 15 Nov 1978.

'Sex and the Service Girl' - Dealing with Pregnancy and Marriage³¹

RAF regulations required pregnant women to be discharged immediately they were deemed unable to fulfil their duties. The Employment Protection Act (1975) did not change the situation. Employers were allowed to dismiss a woman if 'at the date of termination of employment she [was] or [would have] become, because of her pregnancy, incapable of adequately doing the work which she [was] employed to do.'³²

Two earlier pieces of legislation (the Abortion Act 1967 and the Family Planning Act 1967) did affect policies. While the MOD acted swiftly to comply with the Abortion Act, the RAF blundered. The Act permitted abortion in authorised hospitals and patients were entitled to secrecy. On the recommendation of the Principal Personnel Officers' Committee, Ministerial authority was granted for Service doctors to perform abortions in approved military hospitals. This included five RAF hospitals.³³ However, the RAF's Queen's Regulations were not amended. These allowed a woman who miscarried before her 28th week of pregnancy to be retained in the Service. However, if she was not married, a report would be made on her character. If she was judged promiscuous, she would be discharged.³⁴ In consequence, it was surmised that airwomen sought abortions through civilian facilities rather than risk being reported by RAF medical officers as though they had miscarried.³⁵

Contradictions between the Abortion Act and RAF regulations came to light in late 1976 when Air Vice Marshal Soutar, the principal medical officer at Strike Command Headquarters, sought clarification from the MOD. Soutar noted that information about an abortion could come to medical officers from civilian hospitals. Service doctors did not know whether they should keep the matter secret in accordance with the Act or inform the authorities under Queen's Regulations. Mindful that a report could lead to the woman's 'discharge without delay', Soutar

³¹ Heading used by Mr T M P Stevens of the Air Force Department when asking staff to examine policies for inequalities. TNA: DEFE 71/309, Stevens, 9 Jul 1975.

³² PA: HL/PO/PU/4/213, Employment Protection Act 1975, clause 34.

³³ TNA: DEFE 71/50, Abortion Act 1967, Policy letter 12/69, 16 Dec 1969.

³⁴ TNA: AIR 10/5614, Queen's Regulations, 4th edition, regulations 629 and 630; DEFE 71/50, Termination of Pregnancy, Deputy Director WRAF, 19 Jan 1977 and Abortions for Servicewomen, Mr Stevens, 14 Sep 1977.

³⁵ TNA: DEFE 71/50, Pregnancy in WRAF Personnel, Soutar to MOD, Dec 1976.

complained that 'many medical officers [were] genuinely confused about their responsibilities'.³⁶ Staff work on his letter revealed the other two Services had properly implemented the 1969 policy letter. RAF regulations were amended to comply with the Act.³⁷

Response to the Family Planning Act, which enabled health authorities to provide contraceptives to women on clinical or social grounds, was more complex. RAF medical services promptly issued a policy letter instructing doctors that they could issue contraceptives on clinical grounds to all women. Unmarried women could be given a prescription on social grounds if they could prove intent to marry within a month.³⁸ However, Women's Services' Directors thought provision of contraceptives to unmarried servicewomen amounted to official sanction for immoral behaviour and promiscuity. They believed parents of potential female recruits would be horrified. They feared corruption of easily led young women by those of bad influence in communal accommodation. They also suggested that wives of servicemen would protest because servicewomen were perceived as a threat to marriages.³⁹ Their view was supported by senior chaplains.⁴⁰ However, the Principal Personnel Officers favoured the RAF's policy position. Making a distinction between methods of contraception and attitudes towards official sanction of sexual behaviour, they observed that 'there was nothing inconsistent in providing contraceptives for men as this was to contain the spread of venereal disease and not to prevent pregnancy'.⁴¹ Unlike views on women's sexuality, no moral judgement was passed on men's behaviour.

In 1969 a draft policy letter was sent to Roy Hattersley (Minister for Defence Administration) for approval. He rejected the statement that the Services acted in *loco parentis* for young women given that the age of legal majority was due to fall

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, Abortions for Servicewomen, T M P Stevens, 14 Sep 1977 and draft revised regulations, 23 Sep 1977.

³⁸ TNA: DEFE 49/19, Family Planning, Policy Letter 17/67, 17 Jul 1967.

³⁹ Ibid, Chief Officer Mary Talbot, National Health Service (Family Planning) Act 1967, 9 Oct 1968 and Chief Officer Talbot 28 Mar 1969, Annex to Report for PPO Committee, National Health Service (Family Planning) Act 1967, 22 May 1969. The WRNS led for women's Services.

⁴⁰ Ibid, Chaplain of the Fleet, 16 Jun 1969, Principal Chaplain Church of Scotland and Free Churches (Naval), 16 Jun 1969, Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain, (Naval), 12 Jun 1969.

⁴¹ Ibid, Principal Personnel Officers' Minutes, 2 Jul 1969.

from 21 to 18 in 1970. He also thought undue emphasis was placed on promiscuity.⁴² A policy letter was issued to medical officers allowing prescription of contraceptives to unmarried servicewomen on social grounds if they could prove intent to marry within three months. Otherwise, such prescriptions were to be made only with 'very great discretion ...bearing in mind all the circumstances of the case.'⁴³

Senior WRAF officers took a hard line on pregnancy. In the early 1970s, the Directorate championed differential rights for married and single servicewomen, and between those who lived in barracks or in a family home. It suggested amending regulations which required immediate discharge to a system in which married women would be discharged in the sixteenth week of pregnancy. This was to allow time for a replacement to be assigned before the woman left.⁴⁴ However, instant discharge was proposed for women, including married women, living in communal service accommodation. It was claimed that lack of privacy in barrack blocks, 'unpleasantness' for other women having to put up with a pregnant woman's morning sickness and, for the unmarried, shame associated with their condition, were all deemed to justify swift discharge. Servicewomen were expected to have high standards of appearance, behaviour and self-discipline.⁴⁵ These were considered questionable if a single woman became pregnant, a standpoint rooted in fears for the image of the WRAF.

Mr Stevens opposed different rules for married and unmarried women, and for those who lived in barracks compared with those who did not. He argued that the proposal had 'undertones of sexual discrimination'.⁴⁶ After a year of intermittent correspondence, Air Commodore Molly Allott (WRAF Director at the time) conceded. Regulations were promulgated to allow all women to work up to the

⁴² Ibid, Hattersley to Second Sea Lord, 3 Nov 1969.

⁴³ Ibid, Guidance to Service Medical Officers on Family Planning, 14 Nov 1969. The extension to three months was made on medical advice.

⁴⁴ TNA: DEFE 71/50, Airwomen Discharge on Pregnancy, Wing Commander Alison Mackintosh, 29 Jan 1974.

⁴⁵ Ibid, Deputy Director WRAF to S10(Air), 16 Dec 1974.

⁴⁶ Ibid, Stevens to Deputy Director WRAF, 23 Jan 1975.

sixteenth week of pregnancy, subject to fitness and at the discretion of the individual and her commanding officer.⁴⁷

As Chapter 3 showed, servicewomen found it difficult to combine career and marriage. The circular nature of the situation was summed up thus by a civil servant:

‘... the failure to mitigate the difficulties of combining marriage and a service career [for women] has a direct bearing on individual decisions to leave on the grounds of marriage, the prime cause [cause?] of premature exit, thus contributing to short service which is one of the limiting factors on the employment of women’.⁴⁸

In the United States, moves to abolish the right to leave on marriage began in the Marine Corps in 1964 and then extended to the other Services. The result was a proven increase in the period served by women.⁴⁹ Air Commodore Joy Tamblin (Director WRAF October 1976 - February 1980), chairing the NATO women’s committee in 1977, was familiar with these developments and her reports on NATO were circulated within the Air Force Department, including to the Chief of Air Staff and the Air Member for Personnel.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it was believed that removing the right to leave on marriage would have a detrimental effect on female recruitment.⁵¹ Neither Tamblin, nor her successors challenged the policy which remained in place until the early 1990s.

Although unwilling to remove women's right to leave, the RAF made efforts to improve the retention of married women. According to Air Commodore Ruth Montague (Director WRAF November 1989 - March 1994), 'there was a conscious

⁴⁷ Ibid, Stevens to S10b, 25 Feb 1975. American servicewomen challenged discharge on pregnancy, winning a court case in 1970. From May 1975, Department of Defense (sic) rules allowed women to return to work after giving birth. However, Holm (Director of the Women’s Air Force 1965-73) claimed Directors’ of the Women’s Services had been reluctant to allow single pregnant women to live in barracks because it would ‘subject the rest of the women to the stigma that would come from sharing dormitories with those bearing illegitimate children’. Holm, *Women in the Military*, pp.298-303.

⁴⁸ TNA: DEFE 71/309, Sex Equality in the Armed Forces, S10(Air) to DS 14, 18 Oct 1977.

⁴⁹ Holm, *Women in the Military*, pp.289-90.

⁵⁰ Air Commodore Tamblin, interviewed by author, 26 May 2009, transcript pp.4-5.

⁵¹ TNA: DEFE 10/1250, Sex Equality in the Armed Forces, Sep 1978.

effort to collocate married couples' which started in the 1960s.⁵² This did not necessarily mean at the same RAF station but could be at 'units as close as possible'.⁵³ However, from the statistics put to the Principal Personnel Offices' Committee in 1978, it was not obvious that this 'collocation' practice was effective. The committee was informed that 904 members of the WRAF (19%) were married as at 30 September 1977 and that, in the preceding 12 months, 597 women had exercised their right to leave the Service on or after marriage.⁵⁴ Air Commodore Montague's statistics recorded that, in the early 1980s, airwomen served on average for 2¼ years and officers for 4½ years.⁵⁵

Significant changes to these figures occurred over the next ten years. At the time of writing her article in the early 1990s, Air Commodore Montague noted that 35% of WRAF personnel were married, with airwomen serving on average for 6½ years and officers for nearly 10 years. She attributed this improvement to continued efforts to collocate couples. She also acknowledged the policy to allow women to hold the licence for a married quarter that came into effect in 1979.⁵⁶ However, she did not consider women's greater ability to control fertility. Not only did married couples have a better opportunity to live together, but also servicewomen were able to postpone pregnancy and delay the date at which they were obliged to give up their careers.⁵⁷

Service Pay and the Equal Pay Act (1970)

Until 1970 pay continued to be dependant partly on marital status. However, this made service pay rates look poor to potential young male recruits compared to civilian employment. A new system was introduced in April 1970 following a major review by the National Board for Prices and Incomes.⁵⁸ Pay was set on the basis of comparability with civilian occupations, without reference to marital status.

⁵² Montague, 'Women in the RAF', p.226.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ TNA: DEFE 10/1250, Sex Equality in the Armed Forces, Sep 1978.

⁵⁵ Montague, 'Women in the RAF', p.227.

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp.226-7. She was writing just over two years after compulsory discharge on pregnancy ceased. How quickly that affected statistics is unclear.

⁵⁷ There was a trend in society for women to delay having children. The mean age at first birth was at a low of 23.9 in 1972. By 1996 it had risen to 26.5. The percentage of women likely to remain childless was also increasing. Coleman, 'Population and Family', pp.44-5.

⁵⁸ *Standing Reference on the Pay of the Armed Forces Third Report*, Cmnd. 4291 (London: HMSO, 1970).

Personnel occupying service accommodation now paid for food and accommodation rather than receiving benefits in kind.⁵⁹ From April 1970, women were paid 90% of men's basic rates.⁶⁰

The revised pay code also introduced a supplement to basic pay called the X-factor. It 'recognise[d] those special conditions of employment which [were] peculiar to Service life, and which [could] not therefore be compared with civilian employments.'⁶¹ It took account of potential exposure to danger and turbulence created in private life by frequent moves. It cited commitments to accept military discipline, liability for duty at all times without extra pay and inability to resign at will, change jobs or negotiate for pay. These disadvantages were weighed against the perceived advantages of adventure, travel, the chance to learn a trade, substantially longer paid leave than most civilians and greater job security. Women were described as having lesser commitment than men because they were excluded from combat and could leave on marriage. Accordingly, while men received an X-factor worth 5% of basic pay, women's rate was set at 'a token 1%'.⁶²

The armed forces were not exempt from the Equal Pay Act (1970). However, the Secretary of State was only required to avoid making or recommending 'terms and conditions of service ... [having] the effect of making a distinction, as regards pay, allowances or leave, between men and women ... not being a distinction fairly attributable to differences between the obligations undertaken by men and those undertaken by women'⁶³ More simply, the MOD could differentiate between men's and women's emoluments on the grounds that work and commitment were unequal. This allowable pay differential was embodied in the X-factor. Basic pay for women was equalised with men's in April 1975 to comply with the Act. X-factor rates were increased to 10% for men and 5% for women.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ TNA: DEFE 10/1207, Draft Evidence to Armed Forces Pay Review Body, 1 Nov 1977.

⁶² *Standing Reference on the Pay of the Armed Forces Third Report*, Cmnd. 4291 (London: HMSO, 1970).

⁶³ PA: HL/PO/PU/4/199, Equal Pay Act (1970), Clause 7.

⁶⁴ *Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) Fourth Report*, Cmnd. 6063, (London: HMSO, 1975).

Small Arms Training and Combat Discourse

Lack of training with small arms was a crucial barrier to WRAF careers. Women were excluded from some posts, not because they were unable to undertake the primary function, but because they were ineligible for war roles assigned to those posts.⁶⁵ Also, lack of experience in operational work hampered women's promotion prospects in competition with men. Station commanders manipulated establishments in favour of airmen in order to meet commitments to defend bases.⁶⁶ Reluctance to open posts to WRAF personnel hindered the Air Force Department's intention to recruit more women to counter shortfalls of men.⁶⁷ Finally, the absence of a liability to use weapons was a key factor in the argument for paying women less than men.⁶⁸

Air Commodore Joy Tamblin was frustrated by exclusion from training with weapons. She recollected from a visit to Cyprus that the local commander allowed a senior female officer to be armed so that she could fill a post geographically remote from the main base. She thought he was a 'very forward thinking CO [commanding officer] ... a sensible chap.'⁶⁹ She remembered that some station commanders believed security and guard duties 'fell very heavily on the men because the women couldn't do armed duties'.⁷⁰ During visits to RAF stations Coltishall, Waddington and Boulmer, Tamblin encouraged commanders to raise the issue through their chains of command.⁷¹

Change was in the interest of station commanders. Stations were tested against their war roles and the career prospects of commanding officers depended on the outcome of such evaluations. However, peacetime establishments were lower than those planned for war. Operating at a level below war establishment, flexibility was further hindered by airwomen not being deployable for armed duties.⁷² Anomalies were exposed by RAF Boulmer, a UK air defence station. Its senior commanders

⁶⁵ FOI AHB: ID3/110/21, Arming of WRAF Personnel, for Air Force Board, 17 Oct 1978.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ TNA: DEFE 71/226, Arming of WRAF Personnel, Mr West (Head of S10 Air), 21 Apr 1978.

⁶⁹ Tamblin, transcript p.2.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.3.

⁷¹ TNA: DEFE 71/31, Group Captain Mackintosh to Air Commodore Tamblin, 1 Nov 1977 on points raised at Strike Command or Group Headquarters.

⁷² TNA: DEFE 71/226, Annex B to Draft Air Force Board Paper for Air Member for Personnel, 6 Sep 1978.

explained that they were reluctant to take women in 'engineering and support trades as these produce[d] the manpower for the station guard force in war'.⁷³ However, women were employed in fighter control work and so were responsible for 'fighting the tactical air defence battle and for ordering fighters to shoot at and destroy enemy aircraft'.⁷⁴ Their view was that 'There appear[ed] to be little moral difference between giving an order to kill and carrying out the killing ... the effect of a female Sector Controller ordering a wing of fighter [aircraft] or a SAM [Surface to Air Missile] section to engage [the enemy was] infinitely greater than the damage that [could] be done by the same individual using a sub-machine gun'.⁷⁵

In April 1978, taking up the issue 'As part of our general review of "sex-equality" questions ...', the Air Member for Personnel's department sought the views of policy areas.⁷⁶ In response, Air Commodore Reed-Purvis (Director of Security) offered three categories of combat: offensive action in which personnel would seek and destroy the enemy; defensive action where weapons would be used from prepared positions near the place of work; and self-defence actions in which the individual would react to being confronted by an enemy. Of these, he accepted that women could undertake the third task but not the first two. He argued that, as it was anticipated that not all airmen would be capable of operating effectively in action, '... it was unrealistic to imagine that all airwomen could be expected to react as combatants when under fire. To plan otherwise in peace would be to court disaster in war'.⁷⁷ He thought that the most that airwomen could be expected to do was to act in self-defence, to which he added armed guard duty.⁷⁸

Air Commodore Reed-Purvis' view was similar to the army's position on how to better utilise the WRAC. It was proposing to describe women as 'combatant but non-belligerent', with female soldiers to be trained to use 'defensive weapons' for self-defence purposes only.⁷⁹ These intentions to arm servicewomen without according them the same combatant status accorded to men was opposed by Air Commodore

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ TNA: DEFE 71/31, Arming of WRAF Personnel, Mr West (Head of S10 Air), 21 Apr 1978.

⁷⁷ TNA: DEFE 71/226, Director of Security, 25 May 1978.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, Draft Air Force Board Paper, 6 Sep 1978.

Parkinson (Director of Training). He refuted a description of armed guards as 'non-combatants', saying 'we need[ed] to be completely honest in this matter.'⁸⁰ In a later letter he observed that if the intention was to improve operational effectiveness then 'armed women [would] be combatants in the same way that all male RAF personnel ... already [were].'⁸¹

In November 1978, Air Marshal Sir John Gingell (Air Member for Personnel) took his recommendation in favour of arming women to the Air Force Board. In support, he cited shortages of personnel, a difficult recruiting climate and attitudes towards sex discrimination. He thought commanders would be willing to accept more women if they could be armed. He mentioned that the 1977 revision to the Geneva Convention explicitly stated that women were combatants 'with a right to take part directly in hostilities'.⁸² He produced evidence that arming servicewomen was commonplace in NATO and Commonwealth forces. The Air Force Board saw the proposal 'not [as] a matter of "women's lib" but of practical advantage and public attitudes.'⁸³ Although concerned about possible adverse public opinion, it agreed women should be armed to '[defend] themselves, others and Service property' on a trial basis.⁸⁴

A change in women's employment of that magnitude needed to be shared with the other Services through the Principal Personnel Officers' Committee. The Army wanted an equivalent scheme; the Navy was opposed. Joy Tamblin reported the Navy's position as being that 'shore establishments in which WRNS work[ed] [were not considered] vulnerable to attack, thus they [did] not foresee a need for WRNS to be armed.'⁸⁵ Vice Admiral Sir Gordon Tait (Second Sea Lord) more vehemently expressed fears that the decision would 'give rise to vociferous demands from vocal minorities for other and wider changes in the employment of servicewomen.'⁸⁶ His

⁸⁰ Ibid, Director Training (Ground), 17 Aug 1978.

⁸¹ Ibid, Director Training (Ground), 2 Nov 1978.

⁸² TNA: DEFE 71/31, Air Force Board Paper, Arming of WRAF Personnel and Extract from Air Force Board Conclusions, 9 Nov 1978.

⁸³ Ibid, Extract from Air Force Board Conclusions, 9 Nov 1978.

⁸⁴ Ibid, Air Force Board Paper, Arming of WRAF Personnel and Extract from Air Force Board Conclusions, 9 Nov 1978.

⁸⁵ TNA: DEFE 71/226, Arming of WRAF Personnel, DWRAF to S10(Air), 1 Nov 1978.

⁸⁶ TNA: DEFE 71/31, Principal Personnel Officers' Committee Minutes, 13 Dec 1978. Wrens serving in Northern Ireland received small arms training from 1986; it was introduced more generally in the WRNS in 1989 (*AFPRB Seventeenth Report*, Cm. 357, (London: HMSO, 1988), p.13).

remarks were made in the context of an ongoing study into whether Wrens should serve at sea (see Chapter 5).

Concern remained that public opinion would be against arming women. Air Force policy confined women's armed duty to positions internal to RAF stations. They would not be used as perimeter guards but would be employed out of public sight. However, such evidence as there was of public opinion pointed more towards indifference, or surprise that women were not already armed. A senior civil servant pointed out that there had been 'a distinct lack of excitement in March [1979] after the various Press articles on the subject'.⁸⁷ The trial of arming women apparently generated only ten letters to the Prime Minister and these were of divided opinion.⁸⁸ In response to ministerial aspiration to stimulate debate, Ian McDonald in the public relations office offered to try to 'plant a question in Any Questions Radio Programme and ... introduce the subject into the Jimmy Young Show'.⁸⁹ He was not optimistic of stirring interest as 'the Press regard[ed] the issue as stale and the public never seem to have caught on at all'.⁹⁰ The Parliamentary response had also been low key.⁹¹ Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Beetham (Chief of the Air Staff) thought this lack of interest was good news, as implementation could therefore proceed.⁹²

The policy was not contentious in the RAF, though fewer women volunteered for training than anticipated. Officers and Senior NCOs were urged to lead by example. Compulsory weapons' training for all female recruits started from 1 April 1984.⁹³ The *RAF News* sought to open debate on the policy through its letters' column but it did not publish any correspondence, for or against.⁹⁴ Letters' pages at the time were filled with the latest irritation about allowances and conditions of service, particularly perceived beneficial arrangements for married compared with single personnel.

⁸⁷ TNA: DEFE 71/226, Arming of Servicewomen, Mr Boardman, 14 Jun 1979.

⁸⁸ FOI AHB: ID3/110/21, VCDS (P&L) to Secretary of State, 5 Jun 1980.

⁸⁹ Ibid, Arming of Servicewomen, McDonald to PS/Secretary of State, 4 Jul 1980. 'Any Questions' was a BBC Radio 4 programme broadcast on Friday evening and Saturday afternoon. The 'Jimmy Young Show' was a Monday to Friday daytime programme, broadcast on BBC Radio 2.

⁹⁰ Ibid, Arming of Servicewomen, McDonald to PS/Secretary of State, 4 Jul 1980.

⁹¹ Ibid, Arming of Servicewomen, Vice Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel and Logistics) to Secretary of State, 5 Jun 1980.

⁹² Ibid, handwritten note appended to McDonald's letter of 4 Jul 1980.

⁹³ Ibid, Arming of WRAF Personnel, Note by AMP, 30 Sep 1983.

⁹⁴ *RAF News*, 'White Paper Plan to Arm Women', 9-22 Apr 1980 edition, p.1.

With women now to be trained to use weapons and potentially exposed to danger, there was a case for increasing the X-factor. A civil servant in the finance staff disagreed, doubting that arms training would have 'any radical effect on the day-to-day duties of those WRAF who [were] trained'.⁹⁵ Bearing weapons would be a 'minor rather than a major change in role'.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, this was the basis on which airmen were regarded as combatants and a case for increasing women's X-factor was put to the Armed Force Pay Review Body (AFPRB).

Arming was just one of the factors which swayed the AFPRB. Since its previous consideration of the X-factor in 1975, the WRNS had been brought within the scope of the Naval Discipline Act; thus all women now shared 'restrictions on personal liberty' (see Chapter 5).⁹⁷ Compulsory discharge on pregnancy without the right to return to work was also noted as a disadvantage compared with civil employment. On arming, though, the AFPRB was careful to say that women were 'not trained to undertake a combat role' and they did not serve as pilots in the RAF or go to sea in the Navy.⁹⁸ There was an obvious, but unstated, implication of that definition of combat for the RAF, namely the majority of men also did not fly. However, they were regarded as having combat roles. Women's X-factor was increased from 5% to 7.5% of basic pay. Men's rate remained 10%.⁹⁹

Flying

Pilot and Navigator Roles

In the late 1970s, the RAF was experiencing one of its periodic crises of aircrew recruitment and retention. In 1976, on the assumption that requirements would decline as defence cuts continued, the Air Force Board decided to base recruiting targets on the number of new pilots that squadrons could absorb rather than on total aircrew establishment.¹⁰⁰ However, requirements did not decline. Moreover,

⁹⁵ TNA: DEFE 71/226, Arming of WRAF Personnel - X-Factor, Taylor (F2 Air) to S10(Air), 5 Jun 1979.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ *AFPRB Eleventh Report*, Cmnd. 8549, (London: HMSO, 1982), p.8.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p.8.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.8.

¹⁰⁰ FOI AHB: ID3/92/32 Part 5, Brief for Chief of Air Staff, 24 Aug 1977. Total establishment included aircrew in ground-based posts. The number of new pilots on a squadron was limited to avoid too great a dilution of experience levels.

'recruiting [was] well down; quality of those accepted ... [had] reduced; wastage in training [was] higher than predicted; there [was] a bottleneck [in training]; retention [was] below expectations and premature voluntary release applications [were] well up on previous years.'¹⁰¹ Failure to recruit was attributed to uncertainty about the security of RAF careers; there had been a redundancy programme in the mid-1970s. Retention problems were blamed on poor pay and conditions of service with a 'serious and widening comparability gap'.¹⁰² The backlog of men wanting early release (known as premature voluntary release) from the Service was such that junior officers who applied were expected to wait until the mid-1980s for an exit date, causing 'a serious morale problem'.¹⁰³

One of the potential solutions was to recruit women as pilots and navigators for roles described as non-combatant, as in America. While Air Marshal Sir John Nicholls (Air Member for Supply and Organisation) wanted to debate the issue, Air Marshal Sir John Gingell (Air Member for Personnel) was against.¹⁰⁴ All RAF pilots were recruited on their potential to become fast jet pilots. Those that failed to make the grade could train for multi-engine or rotary wing aircraft. Gingell argued that non-combatant women would reduce the pool of potential fast jet pilots and would take training places needed for men. Furthermore, women tended not to serve as long as men. Finally, he doubted that the idea would receive support.¹⁰⁵ The suggestion was dropped.

A combination of a substantial pay rise awarded by the incoming Conservative government in 1979 and less onerous terms of service eased the problem for a time. Instead of permanent commissions which kept them in the RAF until age 38 or the completion of 16 years service (whichever was the later), pilots and navigators were offered a 12-year term with an option to leave after 8 years. This was thought to be a more attractive period of service.¹⁰⁶ It was an important development. As female officers' average length of service began to increase in the 1980s, the argument that

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ FOI AHB: V/9/962, Women Pilots in the RAF, AMSO, 28 Sep 1978 and AMP, 22 Sep 1978.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, Women Pilots in the RAF, AMP, 22 Sep 1978.

¹⁰⁶ FOI AHB: ID3/92/32 Part 5, AFB(77)21, Short Service Commissions, 27 Jul 1977.

women did not serve long enough to make flying training economic weakened (see Chapter 6).

University Air Squadrons

At the same time as pilot and navigator roles for women were considered but dismissed, female undergraduate flying membership of University Air Squadrons (UASs) was also discussed. Formed in the 1920s, UASs were retained after the Second World War as a means of encouraging interest in aviation and the RAF and as preparation for potential officers.¹⁰⁷ The RAF College Cranwell Flight Cadet Scheme having been phased out in 1971,¹⁰⁸ universities were expected to be 'the primary source of the future leadership of ... the RAF.'¹⁰⁹ Male undergraduates awarded RAF sponsorship received flying training; they were obliged to join the Service on graduation. Others were selected by UAS commanding officers as volunteer reserves and given fewer flying hours. Those of acceptable standard were encouraged to join the regular Service but they were not obliged to do so. Some undergraduates joined as ground branch members with no flying training. A few women were admitted as social members.

With the RAF critically dependent on male graduates entering as aircrew, UASs experienced a crisis of recruiting. In 1977, only 91 of 183 available cadetships were awarded.¹¹⁰ The aptitude for flying training of men accepted as volunteer reserves was declining.¹¹¹ Air Vice Marshal Harcourt-Smith (Commandant of RAF College Cranwell and responsible for UASs) put local recruiting difficulties down to 'the sex discrimination problem.'¹¹² In addition to anti-military views on campuses, he observed a worsening situation due to the growth in women's rights' movements. The RAF was seen in a bad light compared with the Army and the Royal Navy, which both admitted women to university units. Consequently, some Students' Unions hindered recruitment to UASs by preventing them from attending Freshers'

¹⁰⁷ AHB: Sebastian Cox, *Note on the History of University Air Squadrons*, Air Historical Branch, 28 Jul 2005.

¹⁰⁸ TNA: DEFE 10/1206, PPO 38/77, University Service Units, 8 Jun 1977. This was a three-year course for officer cadets.

¹⁰⁹ AHB: Cox, *History of University Air Squadrons*, quoting The Future of the University Air Squadrons, Air Member for Personnel, 17 May 1971.

¹¹⁰ TNA: DEFE 71/379, Air Vice Marshal Ness to S10k(Air), 30 Nov 1977.

¹¹¹ Ibid, Air Vice Marshal Harcourt-Smith to Ness, 27 Jul 1978.

¹¹² Ibid.

Fairs. Harcourt-Smith proposed volunteer reserve membership for women, with some flying training, on the grounds that it would 'remove a major source of complaint and [UASs] would therefore have direct access to a larger pool of potential male recruits.'¹¹³ Additionally, he saw such membership as a useful means of attracting female graduates to join the WRAF.

In 1979, a draft Air Force Board paper recommended up to 10% of Volunteer Reserve places be open to women in competition with men. This was seen as a way of placating complaints without diminishing the pool of potential RAF pilots. Women would replace men at the lower end of the quality spectrum who were unlikely to be offered commissions.¹¹⁴ The paper was criticised by the finance department. UAS budgets had only recently survived on the grounds that the squadrons were a key source of pilots. As women could not join as pilots, it was contradictory to propose to train women to fly at public expense.¹¹⁵ Another respondent was concerned about trying to explain in public why women could fly with UASs but not in the RAF.¹¹⁶ Air Vice Marshal Bailey (Director General of Personnel Services) doubted that a 10% quota would 'mollify the women's rights firebrands at the universities'.¹¹⁷ He hinted that the Air Member for Personnel was against women pilots. A revised version was circulated, setting out options without making recommendations. As predicted, and consistent with his refusal to support WRAF pilots a year earlier, Air Marshal Gingell decreed 'it should be put on ice'.¹¹⁸

Undeterred, female undergraduates applied for membership of University Air Squadrons.¹¹⁹ Julie Gibson, studying aeronautical engineering at London's City University, put her case for flying membership to the commanding officer of

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ TNA: DEFE 24/1599, Female VR membership of UASs, Air Vice Marshal Beavis (Director General Training), 13 Aug 1979.

¹¹⁵ TNA: DEFE 71/379, Head of F2(Air) to Director General Training, 22 Aug 1979.

¹¹⁶ TNA: DEFE 24/1599, DS9 to DGT, 21 Aug 1979.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, DGPS to DGT, 17 Aug 1979.

¹¹⁸ TNA: DEFE 71/379, handwritten note on Women VR Membership of University Air Squadrons, 2 Oct 1979. Although UAS policy was not changed at this time, the following year the Air Training Corps (ATC) was opened to girls on a trial basis. Girls' membership of this cadet force was subsequently approved in February 1983 (FOI AHB: V/9/962, USofS Armed Forces, 4 Feb 1983). The ATC was an important source of recruits. In the 1970s about a quarter of all entrants had been in the ATC as boys (TNA: AIR 29/4666 RAF Inspectorate of Recruiting Annual Reports 1976/77, 1978/79, 1979/80).

¹¹⁹ TNA: DEFE 71/379, draft for USofS to Michael Ancram MP, 21 Nov 1979 re applicant to Edinburgh UAS and S10m(Air) to Mrs Wood, 22 Feb 1980 re applications to East Midlands UAS.

London UAS in 1981. She was rebuffed on the standard grounds of '[women's] exclusion from the combat roles and because of the improbability of amortizing training costs before marriage or motherhood.'¹²⁰ An appeal through her MP was likewise rebuffed.¹²¹ A similar issue arose earlier when a young woman named Miss Walker applied for a naval flying scholarship.¹²² The Treasury Solicitor's department advised MOD that it would probably be unsuccessful in defending a complaint to the Equal Opportunities Commission as there was no exemption from clauses of the legislation concerning facilities for education.¹²³ The reply to Miss Walker acknowledged she was correct in saying that the exemption under the SDA did not apply. However, as she would legitimately be excluded from joining the RN as a pilot, she was urged not to deprive a young man of a place but to 'reflect very seriously on the implications for the Navy, the Ministry and the taxpayer'.¹²⁴

A case for admitting women to UASs on the same terms as men was put to the Air Force Board in 1985. The introduction to the paper noted that university authorities, student bodies and Ministers believed membership rules were too restrictive, with a key criticism being exclusion of women. However, as the RAF did not recruit women to be pilots, the paper cautioned that giving women volunteer reserve status could raise false expectations about employment prospects. Accordingly, they would have to be admitted as ground branch members, but with an entitlement to some flying training to satisfy equality concerns. Flying for ground branch women in turn implied that male ground branch undergraduates would have to have flying hours. The paper concluded that the rules should be changed to allow ground branch membership with some flying training for men and women alike.¹²⁵ The paper was approved and a quota of up to 10% of the membership was opened to women from 1985.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Papers of Flight Lieutenant Julie Gibson [henceforward Gibson Papers]: Letter from University of London Air Squadron, 5 Nov 1981. After graduating, she joined the RAF as an engineering officer. When flying roles were opened to women in 1989, she trained as a pilot (see Chapter 7).

¹²¹ Ibid, Jerry Wiggan (Under Secretary of State Armed Forces) to Peter Mills MP, 30 Nov 1981.

¹²² TNA: DEFE 69/577, MOD to Miss Walker, 25 May 1978.

¹²³ Ibid, Flying Scholarships/Awards - Sex Discrimination Act, 17 Mar 1978.

¹²⁴ Ibid, Naval Planning to Miss Walker, 25 May 1978.

¹²⁵ FOI AHB: University Air Squadrons, Air Member for Personnel, 26 Feb 1985.

¹²⁶ FOI MOD: AFBSC(89)11, Female Aircrew in the Royal Air Force, Air Member for Personnel, Jun 1989.

Rear Crew

In the late 1970s, women's foothold as rear crew was insecure. Although employed on passenger aircraft, this was only a limited aspect of their air loadmaster (ALM, formerly air quartermaster) trade's duties. In January 1978, Air Chief Marshal Sir John Aiken (predecessor to Gingell as Air Member for Personnel) considered disestablishing this role for women as there was now very little pure passenger work. The VC10 aircraft, used in place of Britannias and Comets, routinely carried freight at the same time as passengers. Women were deemed physically unable to deal with freight, so a male ALM must always be on board. In war, the VC10 would be used for troop carrying and ammunition supply, tasks from which women were excluded. Only 7% of ALM jobs were open to women.¹²⁷ Although Aiken presented this as a significant reduction, it was close to the 8% approved for women in 1961.

While financial and operational considerations pointed to disestablishment, Aiken sought political guidance on whether this change would be acceptable given the climate of widening women's work.¹²⁸ Air Marshal Sir John Nicholls (Air Member for Supply and Organisation) was against disestablishment. He thought the principle of female aircrew was 'important and we should not walk back from it'.¹²⁹ James Wellbeloved (Under Secretary of State, Air in the Labour government) agreed, deciding that 'the opportunity for women to become aircrew [was] highly important, both psychologically and presentationally'.¹³⁰ The ALM trade remained open to women. Their work was extended to some Hercules transport aircraft roles in the early 1980s.¹³¹

A new role emerged on airborne early warning (AEW) aircraft. This task had been performed with Shackleton aircraft, crewed by pilots, navigators, air electronics officers and air electronics operators.¹³² It was planned to replace it with a more

¹²⁷ FOI AHB: V/9/962, WRAF Air Loadmasters, AMP to USofS (Air), 3 Jan 1978.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid, handwritten note on AMSO copy of WRAF Air Loadmasters, AMP to USofS (Air), 3 Jan 1978.

¹³⁰ Ibid, WRAF Air Loadmasters, Brennan to PS/AMP, 6 Feb 1978.

¹³¹ Date of this decision not traced. However, a report in the *RAF News* (22 Jan 1993, p.1 and p.3) recorded that Roz Robinson joined the Hercules force in 1981. It was also referred to in FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Nimrod AEW - Employment of WRAF Personnel', Vice Chief of Air Staff, 8 May 1984.

¹³² C. G. Jefford, *Observers and Navigators: and Other Non-pilot Aircrew in the RFC, RNAS and RAF* (Shrewsbury: Airline Publishing, 2001), p.216.

capable Nimrod aircraft, fitted with a new radar, surveillance systems and data processing equipment. The AEW task was 'detection, tracking, recognition and reporting of all airborne traffic'.¹³³ The necessary expertise in air battle management was akin to work in ground-based air defence control centres in the UK. This work was undertaken by fighter control officers and the associated non-commissioned trade of aerospace systems operators. Although these specialisations were short of personnel, it was decided to earmark up to a third of the posts on the AEW Nimrod for them. The remainder would come initially from existing Shackleton crews.¹³⁴

As women formed a significant proportion of fighter control personnel, the question arose as to whether they would be eligible for AEW Nimrod jobs. Knowing that women were not employed in combat, Wing Commander Borrett (a staff officer for air defence matters) sought advice as to the definition of a combat aircraft. He thought the Nimrod could be described as non-combatant as it did not entail 'bring[ing] weapons to bear directly on the enemy'.¹³⁵ He also thought that the risk to which women would be exposed was certainly no more than, and possibly less than, when they did similar work in UK control centres. He suggested that in war they might be safer when airborne than working at ground radar stations.¹³⁶ Once again, it was pointed out that there was no international or domestic legal prohibition on employing women in combat. It was a matter of MOD policy, and political and public acceptance.¹³⁷ The idea of using women in AEW Nimrod found no favour with Air Force Board members. Air Chief Marshal Sir Rex Roe (Air Member Supply and Organisation) offered 'to field [it], presumably into touch?'.¹³⁸ Air Marshals Sir Charles Ness (Air Member for Personnel) and Sir David Craig (Vice Chief of the Air Staff) were also against, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Beetham (Chief of the Air Staff) ruled that women would not fly in Nimrod aircraft.¹³⁹

¹³³ FOI AHB: ID3/900/36, Nimrod AEW Manning Policy, 1 Dec 1980.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid, Nimrod AEW - Employment of WRAF Personnel, Borrett to S10(Air), 26 Jan 1981.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid, Nimrod AEW - Employment of WRAF Personnel, Head of S10(Air), 5 Mar 1981.

¹³⁸ Ibid, Nimrod AEW Manning Policy, AMSO, 16 Dec 1980.

¹³⁹ Ibid, Nimrod AEW Crew Composition, Note by PSO/CAS, 30 Mar 1981 and Note of Action, 1 Apr 1981.

Although initially rebuffed, the question of employing women was not closed. The fighter control specialisation had a poor recruiting record and high failure rate in training.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, an ability to master the skills was more important than capping the number of women employed. Complete statistics for any one year are elusive. However, the 1978 complement for fighter control officers was 357 posts.¹⁴¹ In 1984 there were 57 female fighter control officers, perhaps as much as 16% of the complement, and 140 non-commissioned aerospace operators.¹⁴² In addition, of 378 recruits into the aerospace operator trade between April 1976 and March 1978, 128 were female.¹⁴³ Air Marshal Sir Peter Harding, Craig's successor as Vice Chief of Air Staff, proposed employing women in Nimrod AEW.¹⁴⁴ The operational case followed the same line as Wing Commander Borratt's in 1981. Harding added that exclusion would be bad for women's morale and could have an adverse impact on recruitment.¹⁴⁵ Air Force Board members endorsed it unanimously, expressing surprise that their predecessors had been opposed.¹⁴⁶ Ministerial approval was given on the understanding that, as Nimrod was essentially 'an airborne radar unit directly comparable to a ground radar unit', it 'did not conflict with the ruling that women should not be employed in direct combat roles' and women '[would] be placed at very little more risk through being airborne'.¹⁴⁷ However, delay ensued because conversion of Nimrod to the AEW role was a procurement fiasco. The programme was cancelled in 1986 and the MOD decided to buy the Sentry aircraft from the USA.¹⁴⁸ When its crew complement was considered, the decision to employ women

¹⁴⁰ FOI AHB: ID3/92/32 Part 5, Revised Structure for the Fighter Control Sub-Branch, Air Member for Personnel, 10 Aug 1978.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, Revised Structure for the Fighter Control Branch, Air Vice Marshal Ness, 18 Aug 1978.

¹⁴² FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Nimrod AEW - Employment of WRAF Personnel', Vice Chief of Air Staff, 8 May 1984.

¹⁴³ TNA: AIR 29/4666, Manning Plan 26, Aug 1977, Manning Plan 78, 31 May 1979, and Manning Plan 79, Jun 1980.

¹⁴⁴ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Nimrod AEW - Employment of WRAF Personnel', Vice Chief of Air Staff, 8 May 1984.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, brief for Chief of Air Staff, 19 Jun 1984. Beetham, Ness and Roe had all retired and Craig had moved to Strike Command as Commander-in-Chief and so was not on the Air Force Board in 1984.

¹⁴⁷ FOI AHB: Employment of WRAF Personnel on Nimrod AEW, DUS (Air) to USofS(AF), 9 Jul, 1984.

¹⁴⁸ Jefford, *Observers and Navigators*, p.216.

was carried over from the 1984 ruling.¹⁴⁹ The first woman entered training for Sentry in 1989.¹⁵⁰

In the context of potential employment of women on AEW Nimrod, Air Vice Marshal Hayr (Assistant Chief of Air Staff - Operations) championed a new role for some female radio operators. He wanted qualified linguists working at 26 Signals Unit in Berlin to be considered for Nimrod Reconnaissance aircraft in an air signals specialisation. This career pattern was open to airmen. Hayr set out three particular considerations: whether this constituted combatant work; terms of service; and the potential for publicity for this normally secret work. He argued that the reconnaissance role was 'not [regarded as] a combat aircraft in the strictest sense' as it operated at a distance behind the front line.¹⁵¹ The work would not place women in 'any greater danger than girls currently serving in Operations Centres in RAF Germany.'¹⁵² However, he cautioned that 'unwanted publicity' for the Squadron would need to be carefully handled.¹⁵³ This seemed to give his superiors a reason for rejecting the initiative. Consistent with his stance on AEW Nimrod, Air Chief Marshal Beetham asked Air Marshal Sir David Craig to 'pour cold water on this - and drown it'.¹⁵⁴

WRAF Careers

Greater integration of women into the RAF continued while WRAF-specific roles diminished. The Director's job was no longer seen as full-time so the post-holder was given additional responsibility for RAF welfare.¹⁵⁵ Merger of initial officer training was completed in 1979 when all officer recruits trained at Cranwell. Training was undertaken in mixed flights. Recruit training for female junior ranks was collocated with men's at RAF Swinderby in 1982. However, the training

¹⁴⁹ FOI AHB: ID6/1006, Employment of WRAF Personnel on the E-3, ACAS to Air Secretary, 6 Jun 1988.

¹⁵⁰ FOI MOD: AFBSC(89)11 Female Aircrew in the Royal Air Force, Air Member for Personnel, Jun 1989.

¹⁵¹ FOI AHB: ID3/110/21, Hayr to VCAS, 30 Apr 1981.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, handwritten note by CAS, not dated.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, DWRAF Extension of Responsibilities to Include Welfare, Air Member for Personnel, 29 Apr 1980.

remained segregated until 1990.¹⁵⁶ There were other less eye-catching moves towards integration. From 1976, the *Air Force List* stopped recording WRAF officers' names in a separate section and included them according to branch and seniority of rank in the main RAF section.¹⁵⁷ More importantly, 'manpower' statistics prepared annually for the Principal Personnel Officers' Committee included women from September 1979.¹⁵⁸ The astonishing fact is that, previously, personnel analysis did not include the women's Services.

It was intended in 1949 that women would compete with men for promotion. However, the lack of women gaining senior officer ranks led to the reintroduction in 1962 of the wartime system of a separate promotion list for officers whose role was to administer the women's Service.¹⁵⁹ This was designed to provide a field of candidates for the job of Director. Women could opt into this additional promotion competition. In theory this gave them 'two bites of the promotion cherry'.¹⁶⁰ In practice, once they had accepted this special promotion, they were no longer competitive in the common promotion field. For example, Alison Mackintosh served to the rank of 'squadron leader' as an engineer, but was promoted to 'wing commander' and subsequently to 'group captain' as a WRAF administration officer. She was one of two contenders for the Director's job in 1980. Unsuccessful, she was considered unsuitable for an engineering appointment as she would not have achieved that rank in her specialisation and had spent too many years out of the engineering environment.¹⁶¹

The vast majority of women's promotions to senior ranks were through this WRAF administration route rather than in competition with men. Analysis for the Under Secretary of State in 1978 recorded one air commodore (the Director), two group captains (both deputies to the Director) and five wing commanders. Two of the wing commanders were in WRAF jobs. Of the three in general appointments, two worked in administration and one was a fighter control officer.¹⁶² This was much as it had

¹⁵⁶ Montague, 'Women in the RAF', p.226. 'Flight' here means a class of trainees.

¹⁵⁷ *Air Force List*, (London: HMSO, 1976).

¹⁵⁸ TNA: DEFE 10/1254, Strength, Recruitment and Outflow, PPO paper, 6 Sep 1979.

¹⁵⁹ TNA: AIR 2/19122, DDP Pol to DWRAF, WRAF G Competition, 11 Jul 1977.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, A/DDP Pol to DDPG1, 17 May 1977.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, DDPG1 to DDPol, 30 May 1977.

¹⁶² FOI AHB: ID3/92/32 Part 5, Promotion Prospects for WRAF Officers, 24 May 1978.

been since the inception of regular service. From 1949 to 1986 only three women reached the rank of group captain (or group officer before 1968) in open competition.¹⁶³ Of the thirteen women to reach the rank of air commodore or air commandant, eleven served as Director. Only two were promoted in open competition with men.¹⁶⁴ Prospects for senior non-commissioned ranks were also poor except in WRAF roles. Of the 100 female warrant officers and SNCOs in 1976, half were in women's trades. Only 1.25% of airwomen held SNCO rank in mixed-gender trades compared with 31% of airmen.¹⁶⁵

Joan Hopkins' experience provides an interesting insight into an individual's career. Although other NATO countries were apparently more open to women making military careers, there was a gap between policy and practice. From 1970 all NATO job specifications were annotated as to whether they were open to women and, if they were not, a statement had to be provided as to why they were only for men. However, Wing Commander Hopkins' nomination for a NATO fighter control post in Norway was rejected. This caused the RAF's personnel department to wonder 'how many more theoretical "female acceptable" posts would vanish when threatened with the actuality!'.¹⁶⁶ Hopkins fared better under the RAF system. Promoted to group captain, she was the first woman appointed to command an operational station. Air Marshal Sir Charles Ness (Air Member for Personnel) remarked that she was 'selected as the best officer available ... no other criterion [was] acceptable.'¹⁶⁷ On reaching air commodore rank, she declined to be considered for the Director post, preferring to stay in her fighter control specialisation.¹⁶⁸

Promotion to senior ranks required commitment to a full career and, on average, women did not stay in the Service long enough. This is borne out in statistics for 1963 and 1976 on age and rank distribution of non-commissioned ranks (Table 4.1). However, perceptions of lack of value for money associated with short service had given way to perceived advantages. As previously expressed in 1962 (Chapter 3), in

¹⁶³ Joan Peck (an engineer), Bridget Martin (secretarial officer) and Joan Hopkins (fighter control).

¹⁶⁴ Bridget Martin (Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue*, p.261) and Joan Hopkins.

¹⁶⁵ TNA: AIR 2/19169 Study of Factors Affecting WRAF Manning Policy, 27 Feb 1976.

¹⁶⁶ TNA: AIR 2/19195, WRAF Posts in NATO, Air Commodore Pierse, 9 Jun 1977.

¹⁶⁷ FOI AHB: ID3/92/32 Part 5, Future for the General Duties (Ground) Branch, Mar 1982. Hopkins commanded RAF Neatishead, an air defence station.

¹⁶⁸ Air Commodore Joan Hopkins interviewed by the author, 18 and 19 May 2009, transcript pp.36-8.

1976 women's short period of service was seen as providing flexibility in controlling overall numbers as recruiting fluctuated. Explicitly, women were now described as 'a manning [sic] regulator to enable the Service to expand in the short term or contract by natural wastage thus lessening the need to resort to redundancy.'¹⁶⁹ In addition, large numbers of junior-rank women in particular trades were described as enhancing men's promotion prospects.¹⁷⁰

Table 4.1 Airwomen: Age and Rank Distribution 1963 and 1976

1963

Age	Junior Ranks	Corporal	SNCO including Warrant Officer	Total Number	Percentage
17-20	3911	39	-	3950	64.0
21-25	1398	228	6	1632	26.5
26-35	151	63	51	265	4.3
36-45	27	29	145	201	3.3
46-50	6	5	52	63	1.0
51-55	3	3	38	44	0.7
>55	-	-	-	14	0.2
Total	5496	367	292	6169	100

TNA: AIR 2/15789, Discipline and Supervision – WRAF Shortage of SNCOs, 18 Feb 1963.

1976

Age	Junior Ranks	Corporal	SNCO	Warrant Officer	Total Number	Percentage
Under 20	1817	4	-	-	1821	45.9
20 up to 25	1603	153	4	-	1760	44.3
25 up to 30	150	94	21	-	265	6.7
30 and over	17	33	54	21	125	3.1
Total	3587	284	79	21	3971	100

TNA: AIR 2/19169, Study of Factors Affecting WRAF Manning Policy, 27 Feb 1976.

90% of non-commissioned women were aged 25 or younger. The proportion of SNCOs and warrant officers was higher in 1963 because some wartime generation women were still in the Service.

¹⁶⁹ TNA: AIR 2/19169 Study of Factors Affecting WRAF Manning Policy, 27 Feb 1976. At that time, the RAF was making 3,300 airmen and 260 officers redundant (TNA: DEFE 71/145, Air Force Board Paper (75)3, 27 Jan 1975).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Conclusion

Although exempt from the Sex Discrimination Act which came into force at the end of 1975, the Ministry of Defence personnel policy-makers agreed that the armed forces should abide by the spirit of the law, even if there was a presumption that the status quo would prevail. While the impact was not immediate, it had the effect of bringing the question of women's roles onto agendas. In particular, the RAF was concerned about potential damage to its self-image as being more egalitarian than the other Services. With signs that women's exclusion from flying at University Air Squadrons was having an adverse influence on recruiting young men to be the RAF's future elite, concessions were discussed, initially resisted and eventually granted to undergraduate women. This foray for young women into pilot training, albeit without the right to join the Service as aircrew, was an important milestone. It generated evidence of women's potential as pilots in direct comparison with young men destined to join the Service. Within the RAF, women's proven skills as fighter control officers and aerospace operators also widened their proposed employment in the expanded airborne early warning role. Again resisted when first put forward, by 1984 it seemed an obvious decision.

For most of the WRAF, the key development was the introduction of training in small arms which made them as combatant as male counterparts. It came about because declining establishments on RAF stations made the guarding task problematic unless all uniformed personnel could be utilised. By making women as employable as men, this one measure removed an important barrier to posts on RAF stations. Again, it would take some years to prove its value in terms of promotion prospects as women started to fill more important posts. However, it had an immediate impact on pay, with a reduction in the differential. The remaining justification for unequal pay was women's lesser commitment embodied in the right to leave of those who married while in the Services.

Policy-makers went to extraordinary lengths to continue to describe what women did as non-combatant. The principle that women should not be employed in combat appeared to be sacrosanct. It was backed up by occasional quotes from Ministers at the MOD who asserted, but did not provide evidence for, knowledge of public

opinion. Thus women as armed guards were to be trained for defensive rather than offensive tasks. Weapons in their hands were likewise described as defensive. As airborne fighter controllers, women took an indirect role in bringing weapons to bear on an enemy, not directly firing missiles. The aircraft they were to crew also were categorized as non-combat. Risk to which these women would be exposed was seen as not much more than when they performed similar roles at ground-based radar stations because the aircraft would not fly close to the front line. So by geography, and description of weapons, aircraft and roles, women were deemed still to be employed only in non-combatant work. Yet this description would not be applied to men undertaking the same duties. All these descriptions were a means of allowing the Secretary of State to continue to claim that women were employed in non-combatant roles, thus preserving the principle. Also, as all pilots were recruited for their potential to fly fast jets (i.e. indisputably combat aircraft), RAF policy-makers excluded women from elite roles. Nevertheless, senior men introduced new policies that enabled the RAF to exploit the skills of the women it recruited.

With the WRAF Directorate fulfilling an advisory rather than policy-making role, it was inevitable that the influence of women's leadership was not central to developments. Nevertheless, the small arms issue showed the Director's role at its best. When Air Commodore Tamblin identified problems associated with women's non-combatant status, she encouraged station executives to raise questions through the chain of command and supported proposed policy changes at the Ministry. However, the opportunity of setting the agenda on women's terms of service by attacking regulations on marriage and pregnancy was declined. Believing that motherhood was incompatible with a military career and that the right to leave on marriage was fundamental to attracting young women into the Service, WRAF leadership supported extant regulations. This was despite having evidence from the USA that changes to such regulations had no detrimental impact on recruitment and led to a lengthening of time served by women. Without a strong push from senior women officers, successive Air Members for Personnel were unlikely to tackle these obstacles. Women could remain a useful part of the personnel mix while leaving full career paths mainly as the preserve of men.

Chapter 5: The Women's Royal Naval Service in the 1970s and Early 1980s: Femininity Triumphs over Feminism

Following the introduction of equal basic pay in April 1975, the *Navy News* received letters from sailors which were 'rather scathing of the girls in uniform'.¹ Calling this 'sad for the working relationship between the boys and girls in blue', its editorial argued that Wrens:

'... offer[ed] to the Royal Navy as much contribution, generally speaking, as they [were] allowed to make. They often [got] the duller jobs. If the pay system [had] its faults, or the Management [were] defeated on sea/shore ratios, it seem[ed] a pity to take it out on the girls. The place would never be the same without them.'²

Men complained that women had lesser obligations to the Service and this should be more fairly reflected in pay differentials. Specifically, Wrens were not under the Naval Discipline Act, thus they could (and some did) walk away from the job without fear of arrest and prosecution. Also, they were spared the disruption to personal life associated with seagoing.

The purpose of the WRNS remained in question, though as the *Navy News's* item suggested, there was a feeling that it had its part to play. However, defence reviews resulted in closures of UK and overseas bases, reducing the Navy's shore-based complement. With more cuts to come, Commandant Mary Talbot (Director WRNS July 1973 - July 1976) asked for a study into the future role of her Service.³ The study, and subsequent ones on seagoing and flying that it spawned, form the basis for this chapter. These studies took place at a time when legislation put equality of opportunity onto the agenda at MOD. This chapter examines the struggle to define the future place and character of the WRNS as a military Service.

¹ *Navy News*, 'Is Jack niggled by Jenny: questions on jobs and pay', Jul 1975, p.22.

² Ibid. Sea/shore ratio is the term used to express men's time at sea compared with time in shore jobs. Acceptable ratios were set by trade and rank but they were frequently exceeded. Ratings commonly blamed lack of shore jobs on the employment of Wrens.

³ TNA: ADM 167/178, Admiralty Board Minutes, 3 Mar 1975.

In introducing a book of essays evaluating the impact of the World Wars on women's social and economic roles, Margaret and Patrice Higonnet offered the image of a double helix to represent the relative standing of men and women. They described the female strand as subordinate to men's. They argued that a change in status for women was often marked by a corresponding change for men, thus keeping the relative position the same. However, they cautioned against interpreting women's part in the relationship as that of 'passive victim without responsibility for constructing the relationship'.⁴ This chapter will show that extending the Naval Discipline Act to women led to a partial erosion of subordinate status. However, senior female officers and junior ratings alike revelled in perceptions of the Wrens as the most feminine of the women's Services. Women were likely to be vociferous opponents of change, just as many men were. This chapter suggests that, with gender as the central issue in the Navy's job segregation, femininity remained the dominant image of the WRNS. Feminism, seen as the impetus for greater militarisation of American servicewomen, was generally rejected.

In an article examining the entry of women into the British Foreign Service after the Second World War, Helen McCarthy argued that the Foreign Office defended its exclusion of women on practical grounds rather than as a matter of principle. Once practical objections were overcome by women successfully filling diplomatic roles during the war, it gave way.⁵ McCarthy's consideration of arguments as being based on principles or practicalities is a helpful way of examining policy developments in the Navy Department. This chapter will show that the Admiralty Board continued to exclude women from regular service at sea because it adhered to the principle that women should be excluded from combat roles. The supposed impracticalities of mixed crews in ships were reduced to supporting arguments. While the RAF made concessions in order to be seen to abide by the spirit of the Sex Discrimination Act, the Navy upheld women's non-combatant status as the essential factor in the armed forces exemption from the Act. This insistence on combat being the demarcation line also exposes understandings of the terms 'combat' and 'combatant' as applied to ships and women.

⁴ Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, 'The Double Helix', p.39.

⁵ Helen McCarthy, 'Petticoat Diplomacy: the Admission of Women to the British Foreign Service, c. 1919-1946', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol.20, No.3, 2009, p.319.

Pritchard's Study into the Future of the WRNS

Women's employment at the beginning of the 1970s had not changed markedly since the WRNS's formation as a peacetime component in 1949. The WRNS still ran its own recruitment, initial training, postings of officers to jobs and their promotions. Junior ranks were obliged to live in Service provided accommodation, and naval establishments had a cohort of female staff (Unit Officers, regulators and quarters assistants) who oversaw welfare and discipline.⁶ These duplicated male equivalents and were a significant route for promotion to senior ranks for women. Wrens worked in shore-based jobs, such as drivers, and roles which had a significant proportion of shore-based compared with seagoing appointments, for example in the Fleet Air Arm. Women were also beginning to make a mark in new jobs in computing. Outside women's administration, the largest categories of employment for ratings were clerks (28.9% of the trained strength), radio operators (12.6%), stewards (7.9%), radar plotters (7.7%) and stores accountants (7.2%).⁷ The Service mostly sustained a strength above 3,000 women (Table 5.1). A dip below this figure was attributed to retention problems, blamed on poor pay before the major revision of military salaries in 1970.⁸

Table 5.1 Strength of the Naval Services 1970-84

	Thousands							
Year	1970	1972	1974	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984
Men	82.7	78.9	74.7	72.2	71.3	68.1	69.0	67.4
Women	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.4	3.2	3.4	3.4
Total	85.5	81.8	77.7	75.5	74.7	71.3	72.4	70.8
Women - % of total	3.3	3.5	3.9	4.3	4.6	4.5	4.7	4.8

Annual Abstract of Statistics (London: HMSO) Volume 117 (1981) Tables 7.4 and 7.8; Volume 122 (1986), Tables 7.3 and 7.10.⁹

Responding to Mary Talbot's request for a study, Alan Pritchard (Assistant Under Secretary Naval Personnel) was appointed to chair proceedings. He was assisted by a naval captain and two WRNS officers, with civil servants as secretariat. Although

⁶ Regulator is the naval term for disciplinary staff.

⁷ TNA: ADM 105/99, WRNS Study Group Report, Nov 1974, Annex D.

⁸ NMRN: 1988.350.28.15, Senior Women Officers' Conference, 19 Oct 1970.

⁹ Figures in the *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, 1970, combined the RN and Royal Marines. Later years listed them separately. For consistency, this table uses the total of RN and RM. 'Women' excludes nurses who were not WRNS but Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service.

the terms of reference invited Pritchard to set his work 'in the context of the national tendency towards the wider employment of women', his scope was limited by an unpublicised briefing that service at sea was not to be considered.¹⁰ Pritchard noted this constraint in his report, without attribution. Given his seniority – Assistant Under Secretary was the third tier of civil servants in the MOD – the likely sources were the First or Second Sea Lords.

Pritchard's report in November 1974 recognised that, in the absence of combat roles and with the use of civilians in shore-based support for the Navy, a case was needed for the existence of the WRNS. He listed four main factors in its favour. First, well-qualified female recruits were available and filled roles for which male recruiting was difficult or, if there was no seagoing equivalent work, not required. Second, they were cheaper to employ than sailors and likely to remain so after the introduction of 'equal pay'. This came about not only because of the X-factor discussed in Chapter 4 but because men with seagoing liability were in a higher pay band than women in the same trade. Third, in isolated locations civilians were not available. Fourth, Wrens were a loyal workforce whereas 'growing militancy of Trades Unions and even Staff Associations [had] cast doubt on the unquestioned dependability of both industrial and non-industrial civilian support.'¹¹ Wrens were also described as making a contribution to 'the social cohesiveness of otherwise male Establishments, especially in isolated areas.'¹² This was an interesting observation. In reference to seagoing, the presence of women was usually presumed to be disruptive.¹³ Mindful of budget issues, Pritchard recommended greater integration to cut overheads.

Pritchard identified problems in attitudes towards the WRNS, training and employment. Men and women referred to a 'special relationship' between the WRNS and the RN. Pritchard acknowledged that the relationship offered 'the advantage of mutual affection and a closer camaraderie', but observed that it also 'had the hidden disadvantage of disregarding and obscuring the potential and abilities of members of

¹⁰ TNA: ADM 105/99, WRNS Study Group Report, Nov 1974.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ For example, Captain Read to Pritchard, 3 Feb 1976 (TNA: DEFE 69/689, Seagoing Service for WRNS).

the WRNS.¹⁴ He noted that men and women alike regarded the WRNS as the most feminine of the women's Services. While Pritchard encountered 'some frustration among the more assertive but no less feminine [Wrens]', he was surprised by the 'general lack of desire for change'.¹⁵

Pritchard described Wrens' employment as being fitted around the needs of the RN; men's careers had primacy. He observed that women's training was not as thorough as men's. Coupled with lack of sea experience, this resulted in women being given lesser tasks even if they were better qualified than male colleagues. Pritchard picked out examples of stewards and cooks whose training was comparable to men's. However, the former were rarely employed in the most prestigious role of bar manager. Female cooks were given routine work while men prepared more creative dishes. Women promoted to supervisory jobs had few opportunities for variety of work. Because they stayed in post for a long time, they blocked promotions for younger women. This tendency was exacerbated by attempts to retain married women by keeping them in their preferred location to avoid them leaving. Pritchard regarded these employment practices as a waste of women's talents. His recommendations addressed the need to improve the status of the WRNS by reducing the differences between it and the Royal Navy.¹⁶

Apart from his recommendation that women come under the Naval Discipline Act (see below), Pritchard made notable proposals on improving training. Female ratings' recruit training took place at HMS Dauntless, near Reading. Established during the war, it was in poor condition and needed substantial investment to modernize accommodation. Pritchard re-iterated the proposal to move it, mooted since 1969. As it was not intended to combine women and men's training, a number of locations were considered following his report. The strongest case in terms of financial considerations and effectiveness of training favoured HMS Raleigh at Plymouth. This was Navy's recruit school. Land was available for women's accommodation blocks and it had all the necessary training facilities. Despite its advantages Admiral Sir David Williams (Second Sea Lord) told the Admiralty

¹⁴ TNA: ADM 105/99, WRNS Study Group Report, Nov 1974.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Board that Commandant Talbot objected on grounds of 'disparity in educational level and social class between the WRNS and the [male] ratings under training'.¹⁷ However, he thought that such reservations 'could be over-emphasized'.¹⁸ Vonla McBride, who succeeded Mary Talbot as Director as the options were being considered, agreed to collocation at Raleigh. She drew the line at integration of initial training.¹⁹

Pritchard's report also brought about the move of officer training from its prestigious home at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, to Dartmouth where new entrant male officers trained. Again, this was to be collocation rather than the introduction of joint training. Once more ethos was the main concern of the WRNS Director. At Greenwich, female cadet officers and staff mixed socially with men's courses in residence, including senior officers on staff training.²⁰ A London location, in historic surroundings, with mature company was an idyllic setting. The WRNS course included visits to galleries, museums, Parliament and the Courts of Justice.²¹ Reluctance to lose these advantages was tempered by the opportunity to modernise the course. It remained a twelve week programme, but time devoted to WRNS matters was reduced to allow for more content on the Royal Navy's organisation and functions, Britain's role in the world and leadership training.²² These changes were seen as more readily implemented in a setting which already provided such training for men. Two places per annum for staff training were also to be reserved for female officers. In a separate development, the MOD's National Defence College was opened to women of all three Services. These advanced training opportunities were intended to open up more staff jobs to women.²³

¹⁷ TNA: ADM 167/179, Admiralty Board Minutes, 1 Jul 1976.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. It took until 1981 to implement the decision.

²⁰ Staff training prepared officers for work at MOD or Headquarters. Selection was an indicator of potential for further promotions.

²¹ Commandant Anthea Larken, interviewed by the author, 29 Mar 2010, transcript p7. Larken ran the final course at Greenwich and the first at Dartmouth. The move was implemented in 1976.

²² TNA: DEFE 13/1342, News Release, 18 Mar 1976.

²³ Ibid, Second Sea Lord to Under Secretary of State (Navy) 11 Aug 1976 and MOD News Release, No.36 of 1976. Chief Officer Swallow and Major Meechie WRAC were the first military women to attend the National Defence College.

Military Status

The main change instigated by Pritchard's study was his contentious recommendation to replace the voluntary code of discipline with the Naval Discipline Act.²⁴ A case for the NDA was made during the war and when regular service was introduced (Chapter 1). In rejecting it, the accepted explanation was that the WRNS had excellent discipline without need of a legal code. Wrens were considered the elite of women's Services and its recruits superior to women in the air force and the army. Post-war Wren officers grew up in this culture of assumed superiority. For example, in giving evidence to a House of Commons Select Committee, Commandant Margaret Drummond (Director WRNS 1964 - 1967) claimed that introducing the NDA would be a slight on the new generation. It would be a judgement that they had been found wanting in comparison with their predecessors who had maintained their discipline without recourse to military law.²⁵ Pritchard recognised this view, reporting that male and female senior officers described the voluntary code as the 'basis of [the] special relationship' between the WRNS and the RN. It was linked with 'the widely held view that the WRNS [had] remained a "feminine" organisation.'²⁶

Pritchard made a strong case for the NDA on grounds he described as practical and psychological. He dismissed objections made in the 1940s that the NDA was too harsh, as its terms were now in line with those of Army and Air Force Acts. Legal experts advised that using the voluntary disciplinary code for civil offences had no foundation in law and that, if challenged, punishments could not be enforced. Such challenge, Pritchard thought, would come about because of 'the willingness of young people to question the basis of authority exercised over them'.²⁷ He went on to identify benefits of the NDA for women's status. In particular, women would command men by virtue of their own authority rather than by delegation from a male superior. However, Pritchard assigned most weight to the psychological factor

²⁴ It was described as such by Second Sea Lord, TNA: ADM 167/178, Minutes of Admiralty Board, 13 Feb 1975.

²⁵ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers On-line: Report from the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, evidence from Commandant Margaret Drummond, 28 Jul 1966 (<http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk> accessed 1 Mar 2010).

²⁶ TNA: ADM 105/99, WRNS Study Group Report, Nov 1974.

²⁷ Ibid.

of matching 'equality of opportunity with equality of obligation'.²⁸ He thought it would 'stretch the goodwill of the RN' to extend women's employment if the degree of separateness indicated by different disciplinary codes remained.²⁹

Discussion at the Admiralty Board focussed on the legal position. This was urgent as Service Discipline Acts were imminently due for Parliamentary review. Frank Judd, Under Secretary of State for the Navy, summarized three options: a civilian code of conduct could be introduced; women could come under the Army Act as Royal Marines did when ashore; or they could apply the NDA.³⁰ The Board reconvened three weeks later to consider additional advice. Commandant Mary Talbot was invited to the meeting to give her opinion directly. She said she had been against the NDA on the grounds that there was no legal necessity and it would 'appear to strike at the heart of the WRNS system of voluntary discipline'.³¹ However, she accepted new advice that the disciplinary code needed to be regularised. She rejected a civilian code on the grounds that 'with no more disciplinary sanctions than could be applied to the civil service, [it] would wholly undermine the position of the WRNS as a uniformed Service'.³² She suggested Wrens would 'feel their status had been significantly eroded' under a civilian code.³³ Her preferred solution now was the NDA. The Board agreed. However, they wanted to avoid linking it to a promise of wider opportunities as these might not materialise.³⁴ Rather than a ringing endorsement, Talbot told her annual conference of senior officers that the Board decision must be 'accepted and supported'.³⁵ In doing so, she echoed Commandant Jocelyn Woollcombe's words of 1947 decrying the failure to introduce the NDA.

Antony Buck, formerly Under Secretary of State (Navy) in the Heath government and serving on the House of Commons Select Committee for the quinquennial review of military law, wondered how the 'steam' had gone from the NDA issue.³⁶

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ TNA: ADM 167/178, Admiralty Board Minutes, 13 Feb 1975.

³¹ Ibid, Admiralty Board Minutes, 3 Mar 1975.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ NMRN: 1988.350.28.20, Minutes of Conference, 27 Oct 75.

³⁶ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers On-line: Report from the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, Mr Buck, 10 Mar 1976 (<http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk> accessed 1 Mar 2010).

The Ministry of Defence witness, Rear Admiral Homan, made light of it, saying that the 'proposals [were] very small'.³⁷ Despite the Board's caution, and taking his line from Pritchard's report, Homan repeated the claim that women would now have greater opportunities and should have the same obligations as men.³⁸ Parliament agreed to the extension of the Naval Discipline Act and the law came into force on 1 July 1977.

The change in status of the WRNS needed sensitive handling. Fears of mass resignations by offended women proved groundless.³⁹ Protest apparently amounted to female cadets under training at Dartmouth wearing black armbands for the day.⁴⁰ As female officers and senior ratings would have the same authority as men, the next obvious step was to bring in the same rank titles and insignia. However, Pritchard advised against such a move. He argued that it would stir considerable resentment in the WRNS and erode its powerful sense of identity.⁴¹ This was perceptive. Julia Simpson, a meteorological officer, was given short shrift for suggesting to a senior colleague a change to gold rank braid.⁴²

Bringing the WRNS under the NDA was a genuine increase in women's status, giving them parity of military rank with men. Unlike the Higonnetts' double helix analogy, there was no corresponding increase in status for men. Indeed, with the Queen's commission replacing that of the Admiralty Board, men were now obliged to recognise women holding higher rank, as they would a male superior. The visible manifestation of this new authority was mandatory offering and returning of salutes.⁴³

³⁷ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers On-line: Report from the Select Committee on the Naval Discipline Act, in answer to Mr Buck, 10 Mar 1976 (<http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk> accessed 1 Mar 2010).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Analysis of WRNS entries in *Navy Lists* of the period show no indication of unusual patterns of leaving.

⁴⁰ NMRN: *Naval Review*, 'View from the Nest', by 'Snapdragon', 75th Anniversary issue, 1988, p.38. This is a subscription publication. Pseudonyms are commonly used when serving officers submit articles. This article was written by a female officer and covered the role and history of the WRNS.

⁴¹ TNA: ADM 105/99, WRNS Study Group Report, Nov 1974.

⁴² Captain Julia Simpson interviewed by the author, 13 Aug 2007, transcript p.11.

⁴³ NMRN: 1988.350.28.22, Senior Women Officers' Conference, Oct 1977. Report on the introduction of NDA in Naval Home Command stated that saluting was the most talked about aspect of the change.

Women became subject to the same regulations as men and part of the normal, predominantly male, chain of command for summary justice. Serious offences would go to court martial and a woman who absented herself could now be detained by the police, returned to her unit and charged with desertion or absence without leave. As predicted by Pritchard, the incidence of desertion declined. Statistics from Naval Home Command reported 100 deserters in 1974 (before the NDA came into force), 31 in year ending 31 Mar 1978 (the year in which it came in) and 9 cases from 1 Apr – 20 Nov 78.⁴⁴

Post-Pritchard Report Studies

Seagoing

When Pritchard's report went to the Admiralty Board, Frank Judd questioned the constraint that sea service should not be considered.⁴⁵ Further studies were commissioned into whether women should go to sea or fly in the Navy's aircraft as pilots or observers.⁴⁶ Despite the Board minutes saying that the work was to be 'thorough and open-minded' and that Judd 'wanted to ensure that jobs were filled by the best people available, regardless of sex', the task had the caveat that only non-combatant roles would be considered.⁴⁷ This limitation scarcely needed justification. An assertion that neither public opinion nor the Royal Navy was ready for women in combat roles, together with points concerning physical strength, operational requirements and the denial of seagoing jobs necessary for men's careers, were sufficient grounds for limiting the scope.⁴⁸ With warships ruled out, two questions needed to be answered: what jobs could women do at sea and what vessels were non-combatant?

Roles identified as suitable included radio operators, writers (i.e. clerks), cooks and stewards. While women's capability to undertake the work seemed to be accepted, their personal qualities came under attack. Wrens in these 'categories' were described as 'unfortunately ... drawn from the lower intelligence level and [in need of] more

⁴⁴ NMRN: 1988.350.28.23, Senior Women Officers' Conference, 20 Nov 1978.

⁴⁵ ADM: 167/178, Admiralty Board Minutes, 13 Feb 1975 and DEFE 13/1342, Second Sea Lord to Under Secretary of State (RN), 23 Jun 1976.

⁴⁶ Observers were equivalent to navigators in the RAF.

⁴⁷ TNA: ADM 167/178, Admiralty Board Minutes, 5 Mar 1975.

⁴⁸ TNA: ADM 167/176, Admiralty Board Paper on the WRNS Study Group Report, 24 Feb 1975. This note by the Second Sea Lord formed the basis of the sea study.

guidance and supervision than others, [having] a greater tendency to get into trouble over disciplinary matters.⁴⁹ Junior Wrens at sea should therefore be accompanied by a senior woman – officer or petty officer – for welfare duties. The senior woman would also need to fill a job and the proposed solution was to earmark a role in the ship's galley. The ability of petty officer cooks or stewards to meet the challenge was doubted. Various other difficulties were foreseen with the concept of seagoing: divisiveness in the WRNS between women in categories that could go to sea versus those who could not; perhaps a lack of interest in going to sea; the possibility of attracting a different sort of woman in future; and wives' suspicion of Wrens with whom their husbands worked.⁵⁰

The list of possible ships comprised survey ships controlled by the Hydrographer,⁵¹ trials ships⁵² and the Royal Yacht. Rear Admiral Haslam (the Hydrographer) had four ships but their future was uncertain as their mapping function was being considered for transfer to the civilian sector.⁵³ He expressed 'grave misgivings about the adverse effects on morale, operational ability and discipline' if women served in his ships.⁵⁴ Haslam cited particular concerns: the loss of efficiency in ship duties where strength was required; his ships were combatant in war; the expense of modifications 'at a time of national monetary crisis'; opposition from 'younger officers and men'; opposition from wives 'to having ladies cooped up at sea for long periods with traditional sailors'; and disciplinary problems arising from having a mixed crew.⁵⁵ Haslam was 'opposed to being the front-runner in any experiments of such a controversial nature'.⁵⁶ By now he was not just the front-runner, he was the only runner. The Royal Yacht had no difficulty in being excused from consideration. Rear Admiral Janion (Flag Officer Royal Yacht) had only to mention that the Duke of Edinburgh was against the idea on grounds of the cost of modifications to create separate accommodation for Wrens. The Yacht was deleted from the list.⁵⁷ Trials

⁴⁹ TNA: DEFE 69/689, Seagoing Opportunities for the WRNS, 10 Jun 1975.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Or perhaps an unexpressed suspicion of their husbands' behaviour?

⁵¹ The Hydrographer was responsible for provision of maritime charts and navigational information.

⁵² Three such ships were listed. They were used for test firing of weapons. (TNA: DEFE 69/689, Seagoing Opportunities for WRNS, minutes of meeting held on 7 Jul 1975).

⁵³ TNA: DEFE 69/689, Seagoing Opportunities for WRNS, 20 Dec 1977, noting a proposal in the 1974 Defence Review.

⁵⁴ Ibid, Seagoing Service for WRNS, Captain Read to Pritchard, 3 Feb 1976.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, Rear Admiral Janion to Pritchard, 11 Nov 1975.

ships also dropped out of contention because they were due out of service and, as with the Yacht, costs could not be justified.⁵⁸

Rear Admiral Haslam's case against women at sea was supported by senior colleagues. While Admiral Sir David Williams (Second Sea Lord) wrote to Patrick Duffy (Frank Judd's successor) suggesting only the Hydrographer's ships could be considered, he went on to say that, as they undertook long periods at sea, they were 'peculiarly unsuitable [original emphasis] for women'.⁵⁹ In addition, although used on 'non-combatant duties the majority of the time they [were] still military vessels and available in a combatant role'.⁶⁰ Williams concluded that now (1976) was not a good time to 'burden the [ships] with women'.⁶¹ The word 'burden' gives an insight into the thinking on women at sea at this time. Duffy agreed to defer the matter for a year.⁶²

Work duly started again in 1977. A draft paper for the Admiralty Board set out the case for seagoing: the public relations benefits of 'acting in the spirit of the Sex Discrimination Act'; benefits for morale and recruiting in the WRNS by showing 'that they [were] capable of making a worthwhile contribution in what [was] traditionally a man's world'; sea experience for women that would provide 'valuable background for a wider range of shore jobs'; providing personnel in categories short of men; and giving the Navy experience of women at sea before predicted shortages of men for the 1980s and 1990s materialised.⁶³ Potential arguments against were the impact on morale and discipline aboard ships and concerns of sailors' families.⁶⁴

From this starting point a reader might suppose that a robust proposal was to follow. However, the recommendation was patently absurd. Once more the Hydrographer's ships were considered. An additional argument was made against employing Wrens at this time. The ships were due to deploy to the Persian Gulf, a region the Navy Department considered unfit for its women because of 'lack of shore leave and

⁵⁸ Ibid, Seagoing Opportunities for WRNS, minutes of meeting held on 7 Jul 1975.

⁵⁹ TNA: DEFE 13/1342, Second Sea Lord to Under Secretary of State (RN), 23 Jun 1976.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid, Second Sea Lord to Under Secretary of State (RN), 23 Jun 1976, pencilled note and DEFE 69/689, WRNS to Sea, Howell, 26 Jul 1976 disseminating the Admiralty Board's decision.

⁶³ TNA: DEFE 69/689, Seagoing Opportunities for WRNS Draft Board Submission, 20 Dec 1977.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

entertainment and poor working conditions'.⁶⁵ Introducing women into the ships was described as risking 'a further deterioration in the morale of officers and men and their families'.⁶⁶ Again, Haslam's ships were rejected. So the author proposed employing eight women aboard the Seabed Operations Vessel. Commentary from a colleague in the Naval Personnel Division pointed out that of the eight, only two would be in categories that were short of men. He added that Wrens might not enjoy 'swinging around a buoy in a [Seabed Operations Vessel] watching divers dive day and night' and wished the Board paper author 'the best of luck'.⁶⁷ One further point of note – the ship was not yet built. It was due into service in 1982. However, this was presented as an advantage as there was still time to amend the design to include accommodation needs of women.⁶⁸

The proposal was not supported by Admiralty Board members. It was seen as doing little to help the Navy and there was apparently no strong feeling in favour in the WRNS. Patrick Duffy was told by a senior civil servant that 'Politically the move might merely be seen as a gimmick' and he was persuaded to put the idea off for a while.⁶⁹ A further study into the WRNS future would be arranged in 1980.⁷⁰

Flying

As Pritchard's report was being considered by the Admiralty Board, manpower planning staff in the Navy Department were already thinking of training a female helicopter pilot for shore-based duties.⁷¹ Admiral Williams was not in favour of what he claimed could be described as 'an expensive, one-off gimmick'.⁷² As women were excluded from warships, female aircrew could only serve in a limited number of posts. This would reduce opportunities ashore for men and so increase their seagoing time. In addition to resulting inflexibility, women could not be expected to serve for the minimum period (five years) on completion of training. Nevertheless, the Board agreed that the question of female aircrew should be studied.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Interestingly, women in the RAF were stationed in the Middle East.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, Seagoing Opportunities for WRNS Draft Board Submission, Naval Personnel Division 2, 4 Jan 1978.

⁶⁸ Ibid, Seagoing Opportunities for WRNS Draft Board Submission, 20 Dec 1977.

⁶⁹ Ibid, DUS(Navy) to Under Secretary of State (RN), 8 May 1978.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ TNA: ADM 167/176, Admiralty Board Paper, 24 Feb 1975.

⁷² Ibid.

At her autumn 1975 conference of senior women officers, Mary Talbot reported optimistically on progress. Eleven non-combatant helicopter jobs had been identified as potentially suitable. However, allowing for men's share of shore-based jobs, only two of these posts could be filled by female officers at any one time. Five women would be asked to attend aircrew selection with the intention of choosing three to start training.⁷³ Talbot thought this plan would be put to the Admiralty Board for approval. A year later, her successor reported that the idea had been shelved. The Assistant Under Secretary for Naval Personnel had objected on the grounds that the Navy was not short of male pilots and so the cost of training women for limited flying roles could not be justified.⁷⁴

However, by early 1978, the Navy was short of helicopter pilots due to growing demand from the North Sea oil industry. The Assistant Under Secretary wanted to reconsider training female aircrew. He recollected that the main obstacle had been 'the veto on combatant status' for women. He asked now whether 'under pressure of a serious shortage we might manage to persuade ourselves to take a different view of that problem?'⁷⁵ Two years elapsed before a paper was put to the Admiralty Board Sub-Committee. By this time, the Navy was short of about 130 pilots out of a requirement for about 600. As a consequence, it was unable to meet NATO standards of aircrew availability. Male recruiting was meeting targets but, with competition from North Sea industries, the Service was struggling to retain men beyond their minimum period of service.⁷⁶

The 1980 paper on women aircrew highlighted interesting factors in addition to customary arguments concerning cost of training and length of service. Admiral Cassidi (Second Sea Lord) pointed out that exclusion from combat 'was the main reason for exempting the Armed Services from ... the Sex Discrimination Act'.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the Board 'would need to consider very carefully indeed any move that

⁷³ NMRN: 1988.350.28.20, Senior Women Officers' Conference, 27 Oct 1975.

⁷⁴ NMRN: 1988.350.28.21, Senior Women Officers' Conference, 25 Oct 1976. The idea was formally rejected by the Admiralty Board Sub-Committee in November 1976 (FOI Fleet: Employment of Women as Pilots, Second Sea Lord, 12 Sep 80).

⁷⁵ TNA: DEFE 69/689 AUS(NP) to Secretary to Second Sea Lord, 16 Feb 1978.

⁷⁶ North Sea industries were employing 400 helicopter pilots in 1980 compared with 206 in 1976 (FOI Fleet: Employment of Women as Pilots, Second Sea Lord, 12 Sep 80).

⁷⁷ FOI Fleet: Employment of Women as Pilots, Second Sea Lord, 12 Sep 80.

left the Service vulnerable to all the demands of the sex equality movement.⁷⁸ However, he acknowledged that the Secretary of State was about to approve arming servicewomen in the RAF and army and that there appeared to be no Parliamentary or public objections. Cassidi suggested that 'if the UK is now ready to envisage Servicewomen in eyeball to eyeball confrontation with an armed enemy in emergency or war there is unlikely to be strong objection to WRNS officers being trained ... for anti-submarine helicopter operations'.⁷⁹ If this role was included, Cassidi suggested that the Navy could employ a cadre of at least sixteen female helicopter pilots. He believed a cadre of this size was sufficient to overcome previous argument that numbers were insignificant. He dismissed the fears that women would not serve for long enough, proposing that women who accepted pilot training should not be able to leave on marriage. He also suggested that female pilots would not be poached by North Sea oil companies or other competitors.⁸⁰

Initial stages of naval pilot training were carried out by the RAF. If the Navy intended recruiting female helicopter pilots they would have to pass elementary flying training at an RAF station. Admiral Cassidi reported that the Air Member for Personnel 'had been consulted and could see no difficulty in introducing women ... at RAF Leeming'.⁸¹ Such a development would probably have led to questions about WRAF officers' opportunities which the Air Force Board had already rejected (Chapter 4). Perhaps if the Air Member for Personnel was unconcerned about the Navy's deliberations, it may have been due to the different practices of the two Services. The RAF selected all trainee pilots on the basis of potential to fly fast jets. The Fleet Air Arm selected candidates on aptitude for the less demanding standard of helicopter training and chose its fast jet cadre from the best performers in training. This difference in policy could have provided an argument for the RAF to defend its position even if the RN proceeded with accepting women for aircrew duties.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ FOI Fleet: Admiralty Board Sub-Committee Minutes, ABSC/M(80)4, 25 Sep 1980. This could have been either Air Marshal Ness or Air Marshal Gingell. Ness took over in May 1980.

Admiral Cassidi's Board colleagues did not accept his arguments. They saw arming of servicewomen by the army and RAF as 'self defence rather than a truly combatant role'.⁸² They rejected the idea that anti-submarine helicopter operations were not a combat situation. Thus, female pilots could 'compromise the Services' position with regard to the Sex Discrimination Act'.⁸³ They doubted the ability to hold women to long contracts and thought commercial employers were just as likely to poach female as male pilots. In summarising opinion, Admiral Sir Henry Leach (First Sea Lord) observed that an experiment 'would attract a lot of attention and would be difficult to abandon'.⁸⁴ Cassidi was invited to keep the idea to hand in case it was needed in the future.

Combat Discourse

Protocols to the Geneva Conventions negotiated in the mid-1970s defined all members of armed forces, with the exceptions of personnel employed only on medical duties or as chaplains, as combatants. They defined the term as meaning 'the right to participate directly in hostilities'.⁸⁵ Thus, in international law, the personal use of weapons was not the essential element of being described as a combatant – membership of armed forces was sufficient. These Protocols were recommended for approval by the MOD's Chiefs of Staff Committee. The UK's representative signed them in December 1977.⁸⁶ With the WRNS coming under the Naval Discipline Act in July 1977, Wrens were combatants in international law. Restricting their employment was thus a matter of national choice.

The Navy regarded all sailors as undertaking combatant roles irrespective of their duties aboard ship. It used the phrase 'all of one company' to indicate that men shared the risks of seagoing and warfare. If women went to sea, but were still to be non-combatants, then that label must be applied to the ship in which they served. An attempt was made to distinguish between ships whose primary purpose was to fight enemy forces and those that supported the fleet. While that might mean that women were not in ships taking offensive action, it did not alleviate risk. Apart from

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid, Article 43 to Protocol I to the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949, dated 8 Jun 1977.

⁸⁶ TNA: DEFE 4/284, Chiefs of Staff Committee Minutes, 7 Nov 1977.

hospital ships, in war all shipping was vulnerable to attack. Sea warfare was not constrained by a geographic 'front line' which could be expressed in army and RAF debates on limits to women's roles. Until the Navy was willing to describe women's roles as combatant, there was no means of employing them as part of ships' companies.

This exclusion was clearly a matter of gender as not all personnel aboard warships were combatants or even necessarily in the Navy. For example, it was common practice to employ civilian laundry workers, usually of Chinese origin. In addition, civilian staff of the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI) ran shops aboard ships. During the Falklands War, civilian staff were supposed to be given the opportunity to leave ships. This did not always happen in practice. NAAFI staff who stayed aboard were given uniforms so that they would be treated appropriately if captured.⁸⁷ One woman accompanied the Task Force ashore during the campaign. She was Linda Kitson, the official war artist, commissioned by the Imperial War Museum. She was not permitted to embark in a warship, so she sailed to the Falkland Islands aboard the troop ship *QE II*. She transferred to the *Canberra* and landed on East Falkland on 3 June 1982.⁸⁸ She 'followed the troops from San Carlos to Darwin and Goose Green, Fitzroy and Bluff Cove to Stanley itself.'⁸⁹

Opinions on Sea Service

The Admiralty Board asserted that the Navy was not ready for women's sea service and the public would not want women in combat roles. The latter was hard to prove. Periodic surveys of public attitudes showed that most people had little knowledge of the Services. Their information derived mostly from newspaper reports rather than direct experience. There was a tendency to equate the armed forces with the army and survey questions centred upon men's careers. There were no questions concerning appropriate roles for women.⁹⁰ However, there was evidence of naval opinion following the opening of limited seagoing for women in the United States

⁸⁷ John Lippiett, *War and Peas: Intimate Letters from the Falklands War 1982* (Bosham: Pistol Post Publications, 2007), p.182; Rear Admiral John Lippiett interviewed by the author, 4 Apr 2011, p.10.

⁸⁸ Linda Kitson, *The Falklands War: A Visual Diary* (London: Mitchell Beazley Publishers, 1982), foreword by Frederick Gore and pp.41-6.

⁸⁹ Ibid, foreword by Frederick Gore.

⁹⁰ TNA: RG 40/501, Public Attitudes to the Armed Forces, circa 1971; RG 23/497, Report on a Survey, Aug 1976.

Navy in 1978.⁹¹ This prompted a few letters in the *Navy News*. A leading seaman suggested that, if women were to go to sea, they should be in all-female ships rather than mixed crews.⁹² A submariner, opposed to female sailors, put the idea down to 'women's liberation' which he condemned as something started by 'neurotic North American ladies setting fire to their brassieres'.⁹³ A woman who served in merchant ships in America responded in favour of mixed crews.⁹⁴ No letters from Wrens were published on the subject.

When the Deputy Under Secretary (Navy) told his Minister that there was 'no strong feeling' amongst Wrens in favour of seagoing, he accurately represented the views of successive Directors.⁹⁵ Mary Talbot had expressed this stance personally to the Admiralty Board in 1975.⁹⁶ Vonla McBride, her successor, formally responded to sea studies' recommendations in terms of generally welcoming new opportunities for women, but needing to be convinced that there was a 'real and continued requirement'.⁹⁷ This was consistent with her comments to her conference of senior women officers in 1976 that delay on seagoing was preferable, as 'we should not push against the stream'.⁹⁸ There was some merit in this view as limited seagoing was not meaningful in terms of women's careers. However, McBride was personally strongly opposed to women in combatant roles. She regarded fighting as men's responsibility.⁹⁹ She castigated American servicewomen at a NATO Headquarters for their 'jungle green fatigues' and boots, saying she was relieved to see her women 'all looking like Wrens in their uniforms'.¹⁰⁰ She feared that the feminine image of the WRNS would be lost if it attracted women who sought the tough conditions of life aboard a warship, with its limited privacy, lack of individual space, noise, dirt,

⁹¹ Holm, *Women in the Military*, pp.332-3.

⁹² *Navy News*, Feb 1978.

⁹³ *Ibid*, Mar 1978.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, Apr 1978.

⁹⁵ TNA: DEFE 69/689, DUS(Navy) to Under Secretary of State (RN), 8 May 1978.

⁹⁶ TNA: ADM 167/178, Admiralty Board Minutes, 5 Mar 1975.

⁹⁷ TNA: DEFE 69/689, Seagoing Opportunities for the WRNS, Superintendent Sherriff, 28 Sep 1977.

⁹⁸ NMRN: 1988.350.28.21, Minutes of Conference, 25 Oct 1976.

⁹⁹ NMRN: Judith Sherratt Collection, 2009.103.14, recording of a speech by Commandant McBride, 14 Oct 1978; *Navy News*, Dec 77, p.21.

¹⁰⁰ NMRN: Judith Sherratt Collection, 2009.103.14, recording of a speech by Commandant McBride, 14 Oct 1978.

and the need for physical endurance. She '[didn't] want to know the butch girls' who could pass such physical tests.¹⁰¹

Acceptable Seagoing

Although excluded from membership of ship's companies, women went to sea periodically. Until the mid nineteenth century it had been common to find women in Royal Navy ships, as Suzanne Stark's well documented account showed. However, names were not entered in muster books of ships' complements and women who participated in battles were not awarded general service medals.¹⁰² Twentieth century history also holds examples of women serving at sea. As Chapter 1 illustrated, some were employed in trooping ships during World War II and as crew of harbour boats. Post-war, women at sea for naval as opposed to merchant marine purposes could be divided into four categories: Wrens going to sea for a day at a time (known as day sailing); Wrens in support ships for periods of a few days or weeks; civilian women, scientific civil servants or members of the Naval Constructors Branch¹⁰³ going to sea for a few weeks; and members of the Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service (QARNNS)¹⁰⁴ aboard hospital ships.

Day sailing for Wrens was a fairly common practice, predominantly involving female weapon analysts whose role was to report on trial firings. The inefficiencies of returning women ashore and collecting them again the next morning were accepted as preferable to accommodating them aboard ship. Besides the obvious waste of time involved, women considered that it led to poorer outcomes for the work. Male colleagues remained aboard, using off-duty time to develop a relationship with the ship's company and discussing the day's events.¹⁰⁵ However, with permission from the Commander-in-Chief, women could stay aboard ship. This

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Suzanne J. Stark, *Female Tars: Women Aboard Ship in the Age of Sail*, (London: Pimlico, 1998). During battles wives could be employed carrying powder to the gun deck or assisting the surgeon (p.71). The practice of allowing wives at sea faded out when steam ships replaced sailing ships (p.45). For medals see p.81.

¹⁰³ This Branch included naval architects and engineers. They held ranks equivalent to naval ones and could wear uniform with modified rank insignia. Women were admitted from 1974. D. K. Brown, *A Century of Naval Construction: The History of the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors 1883 -1983* (London: Conway Maritime Press Ltd, 1983), p.11.

¹⁰⁴ The female naval nursing service was established in 1884.

¹⁰⁵ NMRN Oral History Collection: Commandant Anthea Larken, interviewed by Katy Elliott, 24 Jul 2006, accession number 2006.74, Track 2.4.

had a certain novelty value as judged by a report in the *Navy News* when a female petty officer spent twelve days aboard HMS *Invincible*. She was the shorthand recorder for a Board of Inquiry.¹⁰⁶

Longer periods at sea were possible in ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA). For example, in 1970 Second Officer Julia Simpson undertook several trips, each of about a week's duration, in RFA *Engadine*.¹⁰⁷ She was a meteorological officer based in Portland. Her section supported deck landing training for helicopter operations. With a male colleague suddenly unable to go on deployment, the captain of her establishment and the captain of *Engadine* decided that she should substitute.¹⁰⁸ Four Wrens were also embarked for two weeks in 1975 as part of an operational evaluation of helicopter support.¹⁰⁹ More systematic employment of female air mechanics at sea started in the early 1980s. Again, these women were employed in support of helicopter operations aboard *Engadine*. A trial deployment with four women was conducted in 1981. A report praised Wrens for their performance of professional duties. However, they were criticized for not participating in mess deck culture. Chief Officer Anthea Saville, working at the time in personnel planning, considered the report unbalanced and unfair. No attempt was made to compare women in their first experience of being at sea with young male ratings' attempts at finding their sea legs. She also suggested that it was unreasonable to suppose that a handful of women should attend the male-dominated, smoky environment of the mess deck.¹¹⁰ Despite reservations in the report, the practice of sending female air mechanics to sea for short periods continued.

Two examples of women at sea were reported in the *Navy News* in 1980. Constructor Midshipman Kirsty Robertson, who was studying naval architecture at University College, London joined the Constructor Branch. As part of her training, she spent six weeks at sea in HMS *Hecate*, one of the Hydrographer's ships. The

¹⁰⁶ *Navy News* Apr 1983, p.18.

¹⁰⁷ RFA ships were owned by the Ministry of Defence but crewed by merchant seamen.

¹⁰⁸ Simpson, transcript pp.9-12.

¹⁰⁹ *Navy News*, Sep 1975, p.32.

¹¹⁰ Fletcher, *The WRNS*, p.126; Commandant Anthea Larken (née Saville) interviewed by author, 29 Mar 2010, transcript p.16.

same report also mentioned Barbara Dawe, a computer programmer with Marconi. She was aboard HMS *Londonderry* working on sea trials of equipment.¹¹¹

In addition to the principle of not having women at sea because they were regarded as non-combatant, the Navy Department also had a list of practical objections. These included insufficient physical strength to cope with their share of general duties about the ship or to deal with an emergency such as flooding or fire, degradation of operational effectiveness and lack of suitable accommodation. An unexpected opportunity to test some of these elements arose in the Falklands War.

Without access to shore-based facilities in the South Atlantic, the Naval Task Force included a hospital ship. The cruise ship SS *Uganda* was taken into service and hastily refitted for the role. Most of the civilian crew remained aboard to run the ship. The hospital was operated by RN medical staff, nurses of the QARNNS and bandsmen of the Royal Marines in their war role of ancillaries for first aid duties.¹¹²

The QARNNS previous experience in hospital ships had been evacuation of casualties to shore-based facilities elsewhere. The role of *Uganda*'s medical staff was different in scale. They set up and operated emergency operating theatres, with intensive care facilities, a high dependency ward and a recovery ward. The ship was at sea continuously for 113 days.¹¹³ Marked as a hospital ship in accordance with the Geneva Convention, during the fighting it mainly sailed in a designated sea area, notified to the Argentine authorities. Occasionally, it sailed close to the Islands to improve casualty evacuation. It was twice 'buzzed' by Argentine war planes and, according to the official history, sailed through a minefield.¹¹⁴

Nurses knew their war role could entail work aboard hospital ships. However, they were not trained for seagoing nor did they have appropriate uniforms.¹¹⁵ The work of setting up the wards was physically demanding as the areas designated to be

¹¹¹ *Navy News*, Jun 1980, p.3. *Londonderry* was a frigate that had been converted into a sea trials ship.

¹¹² Captain Julia Massey (QARNNS), interviewed by the author, 25 Sep 2009, transcript p.6.

¹¹³ Marion Browning, Allan Cameron, Alan Cullen, Barrie Sanderson and Bill Wragge, *Uganda: the Story of a Very Special Ship*, (Exeter: SS Uganda Trust, 1998), p.257.

¹¹⁴ Marion Browning, Allan Cameron, Alan Cullen, Barrie Sanderson and Bill Wragge, *Uganda*, p.266; Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign: Volume II War and Diplomacy*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2007 edition), p.734.

¹¹⁵ Uniform had to be made of natural fibres to decrease severity of injury should they become burns' victims. Massey, transcript p.9.

wards had to be scrubbed clean, boxes of equipment moved about the ship and unloaded, and beds fitted together and secured to the decks. Nurses undertook a great proportion of these tasks, assisted in the heavy work by the bandsmen.¹¹⁶ On the way to the Falklands, water was rationed until a desalination plant could be sent to the ship and fitted.¹¹⁷ Once casualties arrived, nurses worked a demanding shift pattern, in physically trying conditions, with heavy seas making even routine movement about the ship difficult. In addition, arrival and departure of helicopters made the environment noisy so that off-duty rest periods were often interrupted.¹¹⁸

This was the acceptable face of women at sea. While they did physically demanding work, they were not required to undertake tasks associated with running the ship. Like the male medical staff, they occupied passenger accommodation which gave them generous space and private ablutions, unlike warship conditions. Their presence was welcomed by patients who did not find it odd to have women in uniform so close to the fighting. Rather than degrading operational effectiveness, they were an integral part of the success of the hospital ship. This should have afforded the Naval authorities with a successful example of women at sea. However, lessons were quickly forgotten.

Of lasting disappointment to some members of the QARNNS was the failure of Surgeon Vice Admiral Sir John Harrison (Director General of Medical Services) to acknowledge their role during his speech to the annual dinner of the medical services club, held on 10 September 1982.¹¹⁹ This was the first such dinner they had attended, having just been admitted to membership. Sir John welcomed them as new members, but omitted them from the list of tributes paid to participants in the Falklands War. Roles of the Royal Navy and army doctors, Royal Naval Reserve doctors, bandsmen of the Royal Marines, the Hydrographer for use of support ships

¹¹⁶ Massey, transcript pp.5-6.

¹¹⁷ Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service Archive [henceforward QARNNS Archive]: File 45 – Operation Corporate Book III, weekly newsletter, 10 May 1982.

¹¹⁸ Tannoy broadcasts and movement of helicopters were frequent. Captain Julia Massey, 'A day in SS *Uganda* at the Falkland Islands', in Claire Taylor (ed), *Nursing in the Senior Service 1902 - 2002*, (Gosport: QARNNS Association, 2002), p.59 and QARNNS: File 46 – Operation Corporate 1982, diary of a senior naval nurse, entry for 13 May 1982.

¹¹⁹ Massey, transcript p.10. Date of dinner from *Journal of the Royal Naval Service*, Vol.68, Winter 1982.

in casualty evacuation, helicopter pilots and flight deck crews, and the Red Cross and St John's hospital welfare officers were all acknowledged.¹²⁰

Women at sea were something of a novelty. With few exceptions, they made brief appearances in life aboard ship. They were not part of the ship's company; WRNS ratings did not wear the name of the ship on their caps. Men's routines, such as wandering to ablutions in next to no clothing and use of strong language, were not adapted permanently to the presence of women who were seen simply as a diversion from the monotonous routine at sea.

WRNS Careers

Approval by the Admiralty Board of Pritchard's work on the future of the WRNS gave momentum to greater administrative integration that was being explored in order to reduce costs. Postings and promotions for ratings were already integrated with the men's system. This step was now taken for officers, with the exception of promotion and appointments to superintendent (the second tier in the WRNS). In the mid 1970s, superintendents could only fill jobs designated for female officers and it remained the prerogative of the Director to appoint these officers. Like the RN, the WRNS operated a system of 'up or out'. That is, an officer had to be promoted to the next rank within a given timeframe based on age and length of service in current rank.¹²¹ Failure to achieve promotion in that period resulted in compulsory discharge. The benefit of this system was the constant drawing up through the ranks of talented women. The disadvantage was that, in an organisation with only thirty first officers, eleven chief officers, three superintendents and one commandant, there were insufficient promotions available for those worthy of more senior rank. Pritchard intended his report to be the basis for a widening of employment for women. Five years after his report an extra 400 administrative jobs had been earmarked as being open to women 'on an opportunity basis'.¹²² This phrase seemed to mean that, in the absence of a male candidate, women could be considered. Of the

¹²⁰ The speech was re-printed in *Journal of the Royal Naval Service*, Vol.68, Winter 1982. (QARNNS Archive: File 18-1981-4).

¹²¹ TNA: ADM 1/21221 Admiralty Fleet Order 451/49 WRNS Permanent Service – Reports, 11 Feb 1949.

¹²² TNA: DEFE 10/1250, Sex Equality in the Armed Forces, Principal Personnel Officers' Committee Paper, Sep 1978.

400 posts, 43 were actually held by WRNS officers.¹²³ Ten years after his report there was a decrease in the number of senior WRNS officers.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, by remaining a separate entity, the WRNS successfully safeguarded more senior jobs for officers than the integrated WRAF.

Non-commissioned ranks also enjoyed better promotion prospects than airwomen. Statistics for 1974 showed that 14% held Senior NCO ranks and a further 24% held leading rate (Junior NCO equivalent). This compared with WRAF figures for 1976 of 2.5% Senior NCO and 7% Junior NCO. As the basis for the percentages may not have been the same, absolute figures give a clearer picture: 915 Wrens held junior or senior NCO rank compared with 384 airwomen who held equivalent ranks.¹²⁵

Longer average length of service may have contributed to better promotion prospects. However, Wrens also benefitted from being employed in more trades from which men were excluded. For example 68 women held these ranks as dental hygienists or assistants, 43 were education assistants, 17 were drivers, 30 employed as quarters assistants to oversee female accommodation, 45 as female disciplinary staff and 36 as welfare workers.¹²⁶

As in the WRAF, marriage and pregnancy remained key reasons for women cutting short their careers. Exasperation among senior WRNS officers about married women demanding preferential treatment was expressed in similar terms to those of their predecessors in the early 1960s. For example, a 1973 report to the conference of senior women officers noted that 'we move [married women] when we can be sure of filling the gap if they go out ... but it is a bit of a gamble.'¹²⁷ The 1974 report described married women as 'a mixed blessing'.¹²⁸ In 1975, the *Navy News* carried an article about the difficulties of trying to keep pace with an engaged Wren's

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ TNA: ADM 105/99, WRNS Study Group Report, Nov 1974. There were a total of 277 WRNS officers. Of the 45 First Officers and higher ranks, two-thirds were employed in WRNS administration. In 1985 the number of senior officers was: one Commandant, two Superintendents, nine Chief Officers and twenty-six First Officers. This was seven fewer than in 1974 (*Navy List* (London: HMSO 1985)).

¹²⁵ TNA: ADM 105/99, WRNS Study Group Report, Nov 1974 and AIR 2/19169, Study of Factors Affecting WRAF Manning Policy, 27 Feb 1976. Wrens' percentage was related to women who had completed training. Basis for airwomen's statistics was not quoted.

¹²⁶ TNA: ADM 105/99, WRNS Study Group Report, Nov 1974.

¹²⁷ NMRN: 1988.350.28.18, Senior Women Officers' Conference, 10 Oct 1973.

¹²⁸ NMRN: 1988.350.28.19, Senior Women Officers' Conference, 23 Oct 1974.

aspirations for posting near her fiancé.¹²⁹ In 1979, the Director of Naval Officer Appointing complained that 'those who contemplate[d] a dual career as a WRNS officer and a housewife tended to present extremely difficult problems for the appointer' because they were not as 'mobile' as single women.¹³⁰ He preferred that they left the Service as soon as possible.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the WRNS was better at retaining its women than the other services in the 1970s. In 1978, average length of service for Wrens was quoted as having increased from about three years to over five years.¹³² No contemporary analysis of this increase appeared in reports on WRNS personnel statistics.

Despite closer integration with the RN and the new military standing of the WRNS, it remained a separate entity. Although her executive powers were reduced as recruiting, selection, training and posting systems were merged with RN systems, the Director was still Head of Service. However, her role was now seen as less than full time. Like Director WRAF who was given an RAF welfare role, Director WRNS took on an additional task. She became the chairman of the Navy's uniform clothing committee.¹³³

Attitudes towards women in the Service among WRNS hierarchy remained consistent with previous generations. Directors emphasised subordination to the RN and the need to preserve femininity in predominantly male working environments. Commandant Elizabeth Craig-McFeely, who took over from Vonla McBride in July 1979, encapsulated these views in addressing her senior officers in saying:

'.. if the RN has a requirement for the WRNS to undertake particular tasks then we must do it. ... It is important that [women's] careers are safeguarded, that we retain our femininity, the rights of the individual and the reputation of the WRNS. ... it is vital ... that the WRNS remain a separate corps. Our infiltration into the male world must be gradual. If we are to go to sea, fly or be armed

¹²⁹ *Navy News*, 'Wrens' fads and fancies', Feb 1975, p.2.

¹³⁰ NMRN: 1988.350.28.23, Senior Women Officers' Conference, 20 Nov 1978.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² NMRN: 1988.350.28.17, Senior Women Officers' Conference, 13 Oct 1972; 1988.350.28.23, Senior Women Officers' Conference, 20 Nov 1978.

¹³³ NMRN: 2009.103.14, Judith Sherratt collection, recording of Commandant Vonla McBride speech, Oct 1978. The word 'chairman' was always used in the MOD.

then it must be in selected jobs where needed, and NOT [original emphasis] undertaken as a publicity stunt.'¹³⁴

She went on to assert the need to 'maintain the high standards we have always had of dress in uniform, plain clothes, make up, grooming and manners.'¹³⁵

The Admiralty Board successfully resisted seagoing, flying and arming. With another manpower crisis in the late 1970s, Fred Mulley (Secretary of State) asked whether, amongst other possible measures, the Services could employ more women. The Navy responded that '[women's] use in the Royal Navy [was] extremely limited'.¹³⁶ However, their employment was being extended where possible, 'with the proviso that it should not deprive men of an acceptable minimum time ashore'.¹³⁷ It seems that male and female leaders agreed about limits to Wrens' careers.

Conclusion

In a period when legislation was attempting to address inequalities, changes in the employment of Wrens were discussed in terms of their impact on their femininity. Unlike wartime predecessors, who had civilian employment experience, senior women officers of the 1970s and 1980s made their careers entirely in the WRNS. They were enculturated into its feminine ethos and a special but subordinate relationship with the Royal Navy. Successive Directors lauded the WRNS as more feminine than army and RAF counterparts and the more militarised women of the USA's armed forces were derided by Commandant Vonla McBride. A feminist agenda held no interest for Directors of the WRNS at this time. Rather, it was feared because it was perceived as a threat to the character of their Service. Yet the ability to sustain careers as some half-way house between the RN and its civilian workforce was coming under pressure due to cuts in the defence budget.

The Admiralty Board treated women's non-combatant status as a fundamental principle which governed limits to their employment. As it underpinned exemption from the Sex Discrimination Act, concessions which challenged that status were

¹³⁴ NMRN: 1988.350.28.24, Senior Women Officers' Conference, 5 Oct 1979.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 'Plain clothes' meant civilian clothing.

¹³⁶ TNA: DEFE 13/1287, Service Manpower, Dr Warner, 5 Jan 1979.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

avoided in case they led to even greater equality of employment than the limited measures under discussion. Studies of seagoing or flying were so constrained as to be meaningless. Proposing to employ eight women in a ship yet to be built, or to create a cadre of sixteen helicopter pilots, would neither enhance WRNS careers nor alleviate manpower shortages. While Frank Judd may have detected interest from some Wrens, there was no pressure from women to bring about changes such as seagoing or flying which were characterised as publicity stunts or gimmicks.

While the Board sought to preserve the Royal Navy's exemption from the Sex Discrimination Act, it could not avoid all aspects of the legal climate. Unlike its counterpart of the late 1940s, which had declined advice to bring the WRNS under the Naval Discipline Act, the Board in 1975 agreed that the Service could no longer rely on a voluntary code of discipline. Wrens came under military law from July 1977 and with it came authority associated with rank and obligation to fulfil terms of service.

Conundrums of women's employment were not resolved as arguments veered between two standpoints. As in the 1940s, women were represented as either useful in filling gaps left by lack of sailors or civilians, or as blocking jobs ashore needed by men as respite from seagoing. Pritchard attempted to introduce as much opportunity for women as possible under the constraints of shore-based work and gave impetus to cutting overheads to keep the WRNS viable as a separate entity. Integration of bureaucratic processes with those of the RN had the effect of making the WRNS more like the Women's Royal Air Force. Officer posts established only for running the Service were for the most part abolished. Only a small cadre in the hierarchy remained. In future, women were expected to make their careers in their specialist work with only a few migrating into 'women's roles' to achieve senior rank. However, not having seagoing experience, women could not compete with men for the vast majority of senior posts. Thus, while the Pritchard report was successful in opening more shore appointments to women, it did not create a coherent long-term career structure.

This period in the history of the WRNS was dominated by studies of what its role should be, but they failed to resolve the problem of what purpose it served. Women

were given military status, access to better training and more posts, but these changes were insufficient to safeguard their future. As the *Navy News* editorial suggested, women made 'as much contribution, generally speaking, as they [were] allowed'.¹³⁸ As the next chapter shows, the same question was still being posed a decade later.

¹³⁸ *Navy News*, 'Is Jack niggled by Jenny: questions on jobs and pay', Jul 1975, p.22.

Part III:
Integration and the End of the WRNS and 'WRAF'

Chapter 6: Opening Main Combat Roles to Women: How Naval Revolution Hastened Air Force Evolution

'I think people forget the passions that there were.'

Admiral Lord West on reaction to his proposal that women should serve at sea.¹

In July 1989, the Air Force Board decided women could fly 'non-combat' aircraft. At the same time the Army Board approved more support roles for women. However, women continued to be excluded from infantry, armoured corps, Royal Artillery and Army Air Corps because policy banned them from direct combat roles. Four months later, faced with the Navy's proposal to employ Wrens in five 'non-combat' support ships, Archie Hamilton (Minister for the Armed Forces in the Conservative government and a former Guards officer) asked for a brief on 'a recorded Government decision not to employ women in combat - not just the Services' quoting the policy'.² The reply from Miss Willetts, based on information provided by the Army Historical Branch, stated that 'departmental and Parliamentary discussion on the employment of women in the Services [had] been based on the premise that the British public would not accept that women should be placed in a position where they could be required to kill or be killed'.³ Archie Hamilton concluded that 'employment of women in combat' was therefore a matter of 'social, military and political judgements'.⁴

This chapter determines how judgements on acceptable roles for women in the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force changed. It examines how the Navy moved from seeing five minor ships with mixed crews as a proposal which went 'too far, too fast' in October 1989, to being the first Service to open its main combat roles to women in early 1990.⁵ It exposes interactions between Navy Board decisions and Air Force Board policies, and the frustration of advocates of combat flying for women who condemned the Air Member for Personnel's cautious approach as 'too

¹ Admiral Lord West interviewed by the author, 5 Jun 2007, transcript p.11.

² FOI Fleet: Employment of Women in Combat, minute to Army Historical Branch, 20 Nov 1989.

³ FOI Fleet: Employment of Women in Combat, brief for Minister for the Armed Forces, 1 Dec 1989.

⁴ FOI Fleet: Employment of Women in Combat, Military Assistant to Minister for the Armed Forces to PL(SPP)a, 5 Dec 1989.

⁵ FOI Fleet: Correspondence: 'Study into the Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN', Naval Home Command to Head of NMT, 11 Oct 1989.

little, too late'.⁶ It asks why the Navy found itself at 'the leading edge of gender integration policy' rather than the RAF and to what extent equality of opportunity was seen as a new principle to replace combat exclusion.⁷ Finally, it examines continuing exclusions, revealing the new demarcation line between men and women's employment.

The issue for the RN and the RAF in the late 1980s was how to recruit and retain enough people of the required quality. This chapter argues that the RAF adopted an evolutionary approach to female aircrew because it had an existing hierarchy of flying roles into which a small number of women could be integrated gradually. It could delay challenging combat exclusion, preserving elite roles for men. The Navy wanted to adopt an equivalent policy by designating some ships as 'non-combat'. However, a piecemeal approach could not solve problems in men and women's careers. What emerges is the importance of Archie Hamilton in pressing Admiral Sir Julian Oswald (First Sea Lord) for a case 'based on rational analysis, not prejudice'.⁸ But this was a pragmatic approach rather than a conscious drive for equality.

Captain Alan West's Study into the Employment of the WRNS

In the late 1980s, Commandant Anthea Larken (Director WRNS March 1988 - March 1991) observed dissatisfaction with their careers among WRNS officers. They were leaving because, without sea service, they could see no future. Larken described this as 'a brick wall' which blocked promotion.⁹ According to three headmistresses of leading schools, the Service no longer offered prospects attractive to their best girls. Embarrassingly, this included the head of the Royal School for the Daughters of Officers of the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines.¹⁰ While there was still a waiting list of women wanting to join, it was shrinking.¹¹

⁶ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Employment of Female Aircrew', Deputy Controller Aircraft to Air Member for Personnel, 5 Jul 1991.

⁷ Dandeker and Segal, 'Gender Integration in the Armed Forces', p36.

⁸ Margaret Aldred, interviewed by the author 13 Jul 2007, transcript p.5.

⁹ Larken, interviewed by author, 29 Mar 2010, transcript p.15.

¹⁰ Captain Coates' papers: Report of a Study into the Employment of Women's Royal Naval Service Personnel in the Royal Navy, Mar 1989 [Henceforward: West Report], p.11.

¹¹ West Report, p.11.

A report being drafted by the National Audit Office (NAO) on the Services' use of personnel was critical of the WRNS. It suggested that 1,385 of 2,950 posts had insufficient military content and could be performed more cheaply by civilians. These included secretaries, administrative personnel, telephonists and dental assistants. This compared with 1,700 of 4,732 for the WRAC and only 238 of 5,804 WRAF posts identified as insufficiently military.¹² While Admiral Sir Brian Brown (Second Sea Lord September 1988 - April 1991) was unconcerned, Anthea Larken feared that the NAO report could lead to the demise of the WRNS if seagoing was not introduced.¹³

The need for a study into the employment of the WRNS emerged from the Navy Board's consideration of personnel problems in late 1987.¹⁴ Rear Admiral Michael Livesay (Assistant Chief of Naval Staff) advised the Board that retention of experienced men was a critical problem. Too many were leaving, thus increasing time at sea for the rest. In turn, this resulted in more men choosing to leave. As to supply of recruits, he thought the demographic trough developing in youth cohorts (Table 6.1) would be a problem for recruiting junior rates. While the pool of potential officers would benefit from increased participation in higher education, junior ratings were mostly recruited from the declining 16-19 age group. Over the long term, requirements would fall due to the introduction of ships operated and maintained by fewer, multi-skilled men. Complements could be cut further by turning more shore-based work over to civilians. However, he concluded 'it [was] by no means certain that manpower problems [were] containable.'¹⁵ Turning to the WRNS, continuing to use it as 'a manpower make-weight' would not suffice in future.¹⁶ He wanted it to have a wider role 'to pre-empt imposed tasks' or 'a worse fate - a withering on the vine'.¹⁷ To make women more employable, he suggested a study which 'should embrace a review of the definition of combat roles.'¹⁸

¹² National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Control and Use of Manpower*, (London: HMSO, 1989), pp.24-25. Field work was conducted in 1986 and 1987.

¹³ Admiral Sir Brian Brown interviewed by author, 1 Apr 2010, transcript p.5; Larken, interviewed by author, 29 Mar 2010, transcript p.20.

¹⁴ FOI Fleet: ACNS 13/23, 'Headmark 2000', 11 Nov 1987 (extract).

¹⁵ Ibid. MOD documents referring to 'manpower' often intended readers to understand 'men and women'. In this instance the term stood for 'men'.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The Navy Board commissioned research but dampened expectation by 'noting that there [was] little enthusiasm in the Navy (shared by the WRNS) to employ WRNS at sea.'¹⁹ Captain Alan West, decorated following the Falklands War and earmarked for high rank, was appointed to lead the study. With a full time staff of three, he was given six months to investigate:

- i. current and predicted social and demographic trends in society;
 - ii. the need to get the most cost effective return from our investment in personnel;
 - iii. what Ministerial approval would be needed recognising successive Governments' policy that women should not be employed in combat areas.
- ... address[ing]:
- a. Terms of Service.
 - b. Sea Service.
 - c. Flying.
 - d. Total Integration [of the WRNS with the RN].
- taking into account the rationale, rules and experience of other Armed Forces.'²⁰

Better resourced than Tony Pritchard in the 1970s, Alan West had a wider remit. Pritchard considered women's careers in isolation. West's study was commissioned because of concerns about trends in both men and women's naval employment, and wider social developments.

Alan West had spent most of his career at sea and so had little experience of working with Wrens.²¹ He recalled that, had he not been selected to undertake the study, and not having previously considered the idea, his instinctive reaction would have been against women serving at sea. He thought this was the opinion of 'most people in the Navy'.²² Looking back, he thought that 'some people who picked me

¹⁹ FOI Fleet: NAVB/P(88)1 Management and Effectiveness, 3 Jun 1988 (extract).

²⁰ West Report, Annex A.

²¹ At this point in his career he had spent seventeen years in ships and had done one tour at MOD. West, transcript p.1.

²² Ibid, p.2.

thought "get West to do that because he will [say] it is totally impossible and we can forget it".²³ He remembered that 'a lot of senior officers just thought it would be a complete disaster', including a Navy Board member whom he would not name.²⁴ Anthea Larken welcomed his appointment. Knowing he was a highly regarded officer, she believed it indicated intent to take a serious look at the future of her Service.²⁵

Recruitment and Retention in the Royal Navy

Part of the motivation for commissioning the West study was Navy Board concern about the country's impending demographic trough in youth cohorts and its impact on male recruiting.²⁶ The Air Force Board responded to demographic pressures by increasing the percentage of women in the RAF from about 7% to 10% to take advantage of the availability of high quality female recruits.²⁷ With Wrens confined to shore jobs, this solution was not open to the Navy Board.

Naval personnel numbers were not only about the appropriate age cohorts and the potential supply of young male recruits. Levels of male recruitment were lower than percentages achieved from youth cohorts in the 1960s and 1970s (Table 6.1).

²³ Ibid, p.9.

²⁴ Ibid, pp.8-9.

²⁵ Larken, interviewed by author, 29 Mar 2010, transcript p.12.

²⁶ FOI Fleet: ACNS 13/23, 'Headmark 2000', 11 Nov 1987 (extract).

²⁷ FOI AHB: ID6/1006, Force Mix - Ground Airwomen Element, 30 Aug 1988.

Table 6.1 Intake into the Royal Navy and Royal Marines in Relation to Male Age Cohorts (UK) 1966-89.

	Thousands						
	1961	1966	1971	1976	1981	1986	1989
RN and RM Intake	7.5	8.1	9.667	8.167	4.052	6.024	5.759
Age Cohort - Male							
15-19	1917	2178	1976	2167	2424	2296	2091
15-24	3626	4113	4137	4146	4596	4727	4459
Intake/cohort (%)							
15-19	0.39%	0.37%	0.49%	0.38%	0.17%	0.26%	0.28%
15-24	0.21%	0.20%	0.23%	0.20%	0.09%	0.13%	0.13%

Annual Abstract of Statistics: Age cohort figures for 1961 and 1966: Vol. 108 (1971) Table 13. Age cohorts figures for 1971 to 1989: Vol.127 (1991) Table 2.5 (these had a different basis from those of 1961 and 1966). Intakes to RN and RM for 1961 and 1966: Vol.106 (1969) Table 137. Intakes to RN and RM for financial years starting April 1971 and Apr 1976: Vol.117 (1981) Table 7.5; April 1981, 1986, 1989: Vol.127 (1991) Table 7.4.

The Navy would not have been short of male recruits in the 1980s if the usual assumption that high unemployment aided recruitment into the armed forces held good.²⁸ Youth unemployment, while falling in the late 1980s, remained high compared with the 1960s when the Navy succeeded in recruiting a larger percentage of the youth cohort. For example, in October 1989 there were 309,900 unemployed men aged 18-24 of whom 81,000 were aged 18-19.²⁹ This compared with male unemployment for all age groups of 286,000 in 1961, 281,000 in 1965 and nearly 513,000 in 1969.³⁰

Unemployment was most prevalent among school leavers with poor qualifications. In 1988, 40% of the unemployed aged 16-24 had no qualifications. A further 17% had a top attainment at Certificate of Secondary Education level below grade 1.³¹ Sir Neville Purvis (Director General Naval Manning and Training in the late 1980s) explained that, although when he joined the Navy in the 1950s he had 'people who

²⁸ For example, this link was made by Cynthia Enloe who suggested that, as 'unemployment rates remain[ed] stubbornly high among young men', the British army had no need to extend women's employment in the 1980s because there was a ready supply of male recruits (Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives* (London: Pandora, 1988 edition), Introduction p.xx).

²⁹ *Employment Gazette*, Vol.98, No.12, (London: HMSO, 1990), Tables 2.5 and 2.7. Data based on UK claimant count in Oct 1989.

³⁰ *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, Vol.108, (London: HMSO, 1971), Tables 151 (GB) and 152 (Northern Ireland). Northern Ireland figures were for men and women, but have been included in full. Male unemployment would therefore have been slightly lower than stated here. Figures by age group were not collected at that time.

³¹ *Employment Gazette*, Vol.98, No.5, (London: HMSO, 1990), p.276.

could barely read and write' working for him, the Service was now 'looking for people with technical qualifications, with good GCSEs and A levels because those were the things which we needed to be able to train them'.³² The WRNS had the advantage over the RN in qualifications. According to a 1987 sample, 55% of female ratings had three or more GCE subjects at grade C or above compared with 29% of male ratings.³³

Although Alan West did not analyse the merchant navy's situation, he noted that the Director of Naval Recruiting was considering recruiting directly from this source.³⁴ Interestingly, the number of British men in the merchant navy had collapsed over the preceding decade (Table 6.2). Training places had also been cut. There were forty-three new deck officer cadets and fifty new engineering cadets in 1987 compared with 1,220 and 846 respectively in 1970.³⁵ The number of boy rating entrants dropped from 1,745 in 1979/80 to 274 in 1983/4.³⁶ This fall suggests either a pool of potential seafarers who no longer had access to careers in the merchant fleet or loss of interest in seagoing. The former could give the RN an opportunity to recruit. However, merchant navy employment was significantly different from that in the Royal Navy. Junior ranks were largely employed on a casual basis, signing on for a voyage and spending time ashore before seeking another berth. They worked set hours and could earn overtime pay. They had more free time and less onerous disciplinary regulations. Decline in merchant navy employment does not seem to have benefitted RN recruiting.

³² Vice Admiral Sir Neville Purvis interviewed by author 15 Jun 2010, transcript, p.4.

³³ West Report, p.13.

³⁴ Ibid, Annex C.

³⁵ Michael Davies, *Belief in the Sea: State Encouragement of British Merchant Shipping & Shipbuilding*, (London: Lloyd's of London Press, 1992), p.331.

³⁶ Tony Lane, *Grey Dawn Breaking: British Merchant Seafarers in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p.23.

Table 6.2 Manpower on the General Council of British Shipping Register

	Number							
Year	1976	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
UK	33314	17758	15225	14628	10871	9588	8885	7892
Officers								
UK	25019	19268	17536	18328	12706	12785	12114	9946
Ratings								

E J Gubbins, *Implications in the Decline of the British Merchant Navy*, (Loughborough: Loughborough University of Technology, 1991), Table 10.

Despite the apparently sufficient supply of young men in the population and decline in alternative seafaring careers, the RN struggled to recruit enough men.³⁷ Alan West suggested that armed forces careers were 'less fashionable, particularly with young people's apparent desire for greater affluence, personal satisfaction and job mobility'.³⁸ He thought this was in conflict with 'notions of service and long commitment'.³⁹ However, there was a fundamental dilemma in policy which the Navy failed to resolve. It wanted young men in order to accustom them to seafaring before they settled into a more sedentary lifestyle.⁴⁰ It needed them well-qualified in order to meet the demands of the work. However, those with necessary aptitudes delayed entry to the job market to improve their qualifications. The Navy, still preferring to take 16-19 year olds, was accepting youths of lower quality than it wanted in order to meet recruiting targets.⁴¹

Alan West tested various solutions to male recruitment problems. Noting that ethnic minorities were a growing component of the younger age cohort, he considered whether more could be done to attract volunteers from such groups. However, given the Navy's poor record on ethnic minority recruitment, he thought this would not achieve the necessary quick result.⁴² He observed that France still used conscription but rightly dismissed its re-introduction in Britain as politically impossible.⁴³ Finally, he pondered expanding the Navy's participation in the Youth Training Scheme (YTS). This was a government initiative for school leavers, offering a two year programme of work experience combined with training. It was open to those

³⁷ West Report, p.9.

³⁸ Ibid, Annex C.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Rear Admiral Nick Wilkinson interviewed by author 11 May 2011, transcript p.8.

⁴¹ FOI MOD: Navy Board, Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, Second Sea Lord, Jan 1990.

⁴² West Report, p.9.

⁴³ Ibid, p.10.

not in full time jobs or education. According to Brian Harrison, 'By 1986 nearly a third of all school-leavers were joining a YTS scheme.'⁴⁴ However, Alan West found that the scheme had not been successful in the Navy.⁴⁵ Indeed, in the period September 1983 - May 1986, of 6,000 YTS places available in the armed forces, only 2,700 had been filled.⁴⁶

Alan West also confirmed problems with retention of experienced men. He ascribed it to social pressures associated with family life. These included home ownership, wives' careers and children's education. Wanting domestic stability, men resisted increased separation from families.⁴⁷ Retention problems had also happened in the late 1970s, but a substantial pay rise in 1979 stemmed the outflow. However, West thought it unlikely that such a pay deal would be forthcoming in response to current difficulties.⁴⁸

Other Countries

While Britain led the way on employment of women in the armed forces in the 1940s, it now lagged behind its allies. Limited seagoing was open to women in the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Canada had moved on to a trial of women in warships. Denmark and the Netherlands had women serving in warships and Norway also allowed women to serve in submarines.⁴⁹ Alan West judged that sex discrimination or human rights legislation was important in these policy developments.⁵⁰ He suggested that changing attitudes in Britain might result in 'political pressure' in response to 'feminist pressure groups... seek[ing] to impose integration' of women into the RN.⁵¹ According to West, the imposition of policy had been detrimental to implementation of women's seagoing in the US and Netherlands' navies.⁵²

⁴⁴ Brian Harrison, *Finding a Role? The United Kingdom 1970-1990, The New Oxford History of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.248.

⁴⁵ West Report, p10.

⁴⁶ *Employment Gazette*, Vol.94, No.5, (London: HMSO, 1986), p.160.

⁴⁷ West Report, Annex C.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.9.

⁴⁹ Ibid, Annex E.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, pp.15-16.

⁵² Ibid, p.16.

Women as the Solution to Manpower Problems

West reported two distinct perspectives on the WRNS. He characterised the traditional view as seeing Wrens as 'an office ornament'. He believed this led to public perceptions, fostered by press articles, that they were a 'decorative uniformed corps of secretaries'.⁵³ Many male officers were 'unconsciously patronising' in their support for the WRNS, older senior ratings were 'least likely to be aware of the quality of professionalism' of Wrens, and junior ratings thought they blocked shore jobs.⁵⁴ The feminine image used to encourage recruiting, he argued 'inhibit[ed] understanding of the fact that the WRNS [was] closely involved in highly technical and operational work'.⁵⁵ This was a fundamental dilemma in discussing wider employment of Wrens. Seagoing was thought likely to attract a different sort of woman that would be detrimental to this customary view of a 'feminine' Service. West took pains to say that women in other navies were no less feminine even though they served at sea.⁵⁶

Worries about 'femininity' could be seen as code for 'sexuality'. The potential for sexual relationships was an important concern of those opposing women serving in ships. Alan West was briefed to consider the potential for sexual liaisons and women's assumed poor work performance during menstruation.⁵⁷ The latter he dismissed after consulting the Navy's medical authorities.⁵⁸ Having examined experience in the US and Dutch navies, he acknowledged, but played down, problems arising from heterosexual relationships. Lesbianism was a more sensitive subject. Homosexual practices were illegal under military law. This ban continued until 2000.⁵⁹ West sought to allay fears, noting 'evidence [did] not suggest that the incidence of lesbianism [rose] with the introduction of sea service'.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, there was recognition that seagoing would appeal to a cohort of women prepared for

⁵³ Ibid, p.5 and p.7.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.6.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.7.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.23.

⁵⁷ West, transcript p.3.

⁵⁸ West Report, pp.25-6.

⁵⁹ Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.377.

⁶⁰ West Report, p.23 and p.25. These comments drew on visits to American, Dutch and New Zealand navies.

the rigours of life at sea and thus there would be a divergence from the former style of the WRNS.

Alan West recommended that women should go to sea from April 1990 and the WRNS should merge with the RN on 1 April 1991.⁶¹ This was intended to give women full career opportunities, solve both quality and quantity issues in recruitment and, by reducing the strains caused by shortages of personnel, it was hoped to improve retention.

But what ships would be opened to women? West seems to have chosen, or been encouraged to take, a narrow interpretation of his terms of reference. He ignored the invitation to consider Ministerial approval in connection with combat roles, stating that 'Fortunately it [did] not lie within the remit of this study to attempt to overcome [political objections].'⁶² Setting aside warships, West worked out the number of jobs which could be done by women in minor vessels. He proposed a limit of 10-15% of the posts in any one ship as a starting point.⁶³ This was to take account of suggestions that women were not strong enough to carry out some of the communal duties, such as loading ship's stores and damage control tasks. The potential female complement was also affected by the constraint of dividing accommodation between men and women. Junior ratings lived in communal mess decks. West recommended that in mixed ships, mess decks should be single sex. He identified five ships which would be suitable: HMS *Hecla* and HMS *Roebuck* (survey ships); HMS *Shetland* (an offshore patrol vessel); HMS *Challenger* (the seabed operations vessel); and HMS *Juno* (a former frigate then used as a navigation training ship).⁶⁴ Applying a 15% limit to the complement figures provided in his report, opening these initial five ships would have created approximately 78 posts for women.⁶⁵

Alan West saw this as a critical moment for the WRNS, stating that many Wrens felt that they were 'poised for a big breakthrough and many [saw] this Study as the catalyst ... Failure to grasp the opportunity would be a major disappointment,

⁶¹ Ibid, p.35.

⁶² Ibid, p.20.

⁶³ Ibid, p.26.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.31.

⁶⁵ Calculation by the author by applying a 15% cap to complement figures for these ships at West Report, Annex F.

leading to frustration and demotivation.⁶⁶ He believed that his recommendations safeguarded women's roles from the 'predatory gaze of the NAO'.⁶⁷ When interviewed in 2007, he described his report as 'pusillanimous'.⁶⁸ He knew the issue was sensitive and, in many quarters of both the RN and the WRNS, deeply unpopular. Although he had some supporters, he received abusive telephone calls from contemporaries who were not convinced.⁶⁹ However, detractors had no viable alternative to offer to personnel shortages. Alan West thought he had 'kick[ed] open the door' with a seagoing recommendation which he described as 'what the market would bear'.⁷⁰

Decision on the Future of the WRNS

The key men determining the future of the WRNS were Admiral Sir Brian Brown (Second Sea Lord), Admiral Sir Julian Oswald (First Sea Lord) and Archie Hamilton. Brian Brown was a supply and secretariat officer rather than a seaman officer. He had also served as a pilot. He described himself as the Navy Board member with most reservations about seagoing, on the grounds that it would be his responsibility to make the policy work.⁷¹ However, he also appears to have doubted the morality of employing women in combat roles while naval men might be in safe jobs ashore. Remembering media coverage of the Falklands War, he recoiled from the thought of female burns' victims appearing on television.⁷² Admiral Oswald, who took over as First Sea Lord in May 1989, was also thought to be reluctant to have Wrens at sea.⁷³ Looking back in 2004, he admitted he was not initially convinced, but said he wanted to listen to the arguments.⁷⁴

Brian Brown was not persuaded that women's career prospects were inadequate. Rather, he thought there was no evidence that women were leaving, there was a plentiful supply of replacements, and it would not necessarily be a disadvantage if

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.7.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.28.

⁶⁸ West, transcript p.7.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.11.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.13.

⁷¹ Brown, interviewed by author, 1 Apr 2010, transcript p.15.

⁷² Ibid, pp.7-8.

⁷³ Aldred, transcript p.4; Larken, interviewed by author, 29 Mar 2010, transcript p.21; Rear Admiral Wilkinson, e-mail to author, 12 Nov 2012.

⁷⁴ IWM Sound Archive: Admiral Sir Julian Oswald, Dec 2004, accession number 27454, reel 31.

they were of lesser quality than hitherto. He dismissed National Audit Office criticisms. He was 'not firmly [author's emphasis] opposed to women at sea' but he thought Wrens did not want seagoing.⁷⁵ He also thought the case for integrating women into the Royal Navy was unproven.

It took Admiral Brown three months to send Alan West's report to departments and headquarters for consideration. Recipients were given a further three months to comment. Alongside the operational case for change and financial factors, the 'overriding consideration' was the 'future manning needs of the Royal Navy'.⁷⁶ This protracted timescale is indicative of how controversial the recommendations were. Admiral Brown subsequently said he intended to 'give people a chance first to chew it over thoroughly and to evolve their thoughts ... basically get used to the fact that [seagoing for women was] perhaps a prospect.'⁷⁷

Women's ability to undertake professional duties aboard ships was not in doubt. Captain Wilkinson, Secretary to Admiral Oswald, sounded out officers in the Naval staff and told the Admiral that views on this were favourable, as:

'There were very severe shortages in certain branches - radio operators in particular - also stewards - where the women were very strong ... and radar operators, too - we all knew that women were very good at sitting in front of a radar screen or listening for long periods - much better than young men.'⁷⁸

The radio operator category was critically under-staffed, with about 70 able seaman posts vacant in ships.⁷⁹ But there was concern about the physical strength needed for emergencies (fire fighting and damage control) and handling supplies when ships' stores were replenished. Archie Hamilton thought such worries were exaggerated.

⁷⁵ FOI Fleet: The WRNS Study, Second Sea Lord to DGNMT, 11 Apr 1989.

⁷⁶ FOI Fleet: Correspondence: 'Study into the Employment of WRNS Personnel in the Royal Navy', Head of NMT, 30 Jun 1989.

⁷⁷ Brown, interviewed by author, 1 Apr 2010, transcript p.1.

⁷⁸ Wilkinson, transcript p.7.

⁷⁹ FOI MOD: Navy Board, Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, Second Sea Lord, Jan 1990.

He believed that a case could equally be made for the limitations of over-weight men which was apparently a problem.⁸⁰

Written comments mostly avoided the social impact of women aboard ship though Rear Admiral Hugo White (Assistant Chief of Naval Staff) thought this was likely to be a greater source of difficulty than working at sea.⁸¹ Raising the subject of wives' attitudes, Naval Home Command also expressed concerns.⁸² A staff officer working in naval discipline wanted clarity on fraternisation rules. He feared changes could 'endanger our line on homosexuality'.⁸³

It was apparent from comments on West's recommendations that limited seagoing for women would not solve the Navy's 'manpower' problem. The Navy was short of over 200 men at sea, a further 600 were filling posts in ships for which they had insufficient experience, and there were 2,000 vacancies ashore.⁸⁴ Estimates of the number of women at sea, if West's recommendations had been implemented, varied from 150 - 250. These would predominantly be junior ranks and would not match the skill deficiencies at sea.⁸⁵ Assuming a limit of 15% of ships' complements was still being applied, these estimates would appear to be based on policy being extended to all ships in the classes of West's proposed list of five initial ships, plus some additional minor vessel classes.

Two strands emerged in replies: improving men's retention or finding more ships that qualified as 'non-combatant'. Naval Home Command feared that women at sea could worsen the situation if unhappy wives of sailors persuaded their husbands to

⁸⁰ NMRN Oral History Collection: Lord Hamilton of Epsom interviewed by Katy Elliott, 4 July 2006, accession number 2006.65, track 3 and track 6; Lord Hamilton interviewed by author, 6 Apr 2011, transcript p.1.

⁸¹ FOI Fleet: Correspondence: 'Study into the Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN', ACNS to Head of NMT, 29 Sep 1989.

⁸² Ibid, Naval Home Command to Head of NMT, 11 Oct 1989.

⁸³ Ibid, NP3(Discipline) to Head of NMT, 5 Sep 1989.

⁸⁴ Ibid, Fleet Headquarters to Head of NMT, 3 Oct 1989. The subsequent Navy Board paper stated that vacancies at sea had risen to 300 (FOI MOD: Navy Board, Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, Second Sea Lord, Jan 1990).

⁸⁵ FOI Fleet: Correspondence: 'Study into the Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN', Director WRNS to Head of NMT, 3 Oct 1989 and FOI Fleet: The WRNS Study, Second Sea Lord to DGNMT, 11 Apr 1989.

leave.⁸⁶ Fleet Headquarters suggested that, if a reduction in men's early leaving from the prevailing 8% to 7.4% could be achieved, it would cover the shortfall.⁸⁷ Rear Admiral White thought better pay to improve retention of men would be more likely to improve the position than women's limited seagoing. The latter should only be pursued if 'it [was] assessed that no other measure or mix of measures of comparable cost could successfully overcome RN manpower shortages'.⁸⁸ However, no financial analysis was offered and aspirations to improve retention had been unfulfilled for decades. Better pay, even if it could be negotiated, was only likely to be a short term palliative before patterns of behaviour based on family and career factors were reasserted.

Some attempt was made to identify additional opportunities for seagoing. Ideas included Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships, warships during periods when they were only doing sea trials, providing skeleton crews needed when ships were undergoing refit, warships until war was in the offing then replacing women with men.⁸⁹ The latter was a persistent idea. However, Brian Brown saw it as the worst of possible solutions.⁹⁰ It would undermine the 'work up' concept, during which ships' complements trained together in a variety of scenarios and simulated emergencies. Further, if an unexpected operation had to be mounted in haste, there could be insufficient time to replace women. Indeed, there might not be men available. In addition, it would undermine the credibility of women who would be seen as 'fair weather sailors'.⁹¹ Fundamentally, it would weaken operational effectiveness, a key fear of policy-makers. In these efforts to expand opportunities at sea nobody recommended full service in warships.

Alan West's other key recommendation, that women should be integrated into the Royal Navy by April 1991, attracted little support. There would be too few women

⁸⁶ FOI Fleet: Correspondence: 'Study into the Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN', Naval Home Command to Head of NMT, 11 Oct 1989.

⁸⁷ Ibid, Fleet Headquarters to Head of NMT, 3 Oct 1989.

⁸⁸ Ibid, ACNS to Head of NMT, 29 Sep 1989.

⁸⁹ FOI Fleet: The WRNS Study, Controller of the Navy to Second Sea Lord, 22 May 1989; FOI Fleet: Correspondence: 'Study into the Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN', DGNMT to Head of NMT, 29 [Sep] 1989 and Director WRNS to Head of NMT, 3 Oct 1989.

⁹⁰ FOI MOD: NAVB/P(90)1 Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, 24 Jan 1990 and NMRN Oral History Collection: Admiral Sir Brian Brown interviewed by Dr Chris Howard Bailey, 6 Dec 1993, accession number 1993/456, CD2 Track 9.

⁹¹ FOI MOD: NAVB/P(90)1 Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, 24 Jan 1990.

gaining experience at sea to make integration meaningful. However, there was willingness to offer outward signs of convergence with the men's Service by adopting RN rank titles, and gold lace to replace the blue lace of the WRNS for rank and badges on uniforms.⁹² Even so, Home Command thought this would take two years to achieve.⁹³ Mr Brack (Assistant under Secretary for Naval Personnel), observing that the other Services were making changes in women's employment, thought the Navy must do something, but there was 'no need to be revolutionary: evolutionary ... [was] quite sufficient.'⁹⁴ He favoured some seagoing, but thought integration of women into the Royal Navy unnecessary. He suggested a quick move to adopt RN rank titles and insignia. As these measures were completed in the army in 1950 and the RAF in 1968, this hardly seemed to meet his own test of making 'one or a few distinct and high profile changes' to keep pace with the other Services.⁹⁵

Female Perspectives

Assessments of the wider employment of women in allied navies referred to feminist pressure driving change. This was seen in a negative light and something to be avoided because an imposed policy would be more difficult to implement and it would be hard for the Navy Board to set limits to new opportunities.⁹⁶ However, it is not apparent that women's military employment featured in British feminist groups' agendas. For example, articles in the feminist publication *Spare Rib* suggest a stance on women taking part in combat which was divided into distinct categories. Armed female freedom fighters acting against repressive regimes were lauded. Articles on armed forces in Britain took issue with the basing of cruise missiles and condemned aggressive actions of the army in Northern Ireland. Rather than pressing for British servicewomen's equality, it disparaged their participation.⁹⁷ In 1981, Lesley

⁹² FOI Fleet: The WRNS Study, Second Sea Lord to DGNMT, 11 Apr 1989; FOI Fleet: Correspondence: 'Study into the Employment of WRNS Personnel in the Royal Navy', Nav Sec to Head of NMT, Sep 1989, DGNPS to Head of NMT, 29 Sep 1989, DGST(N) to Head of NMT, 2 Oct 1989, Fleet Headquarters to Head of NMT, 3 Oct 1989 and Director WRNS to Head of NMT, 3 Oct 1989.

⁹³ FOI Fleet: Correspondence: 'Study into the Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN', Naval Home Command to Head of NMT, 11 Oct 1989.

⁹⁴ Ibid, AUS(NP) to Head of NMT, 16 Aug 1989.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ FOI Fleet: ACNS 13/23, 'Headmark 2000', 11 Nov 1987 (extract); West Report, p.10.

⁹⁷ *Spare Rib*, liberation fighter articles: Vietnam, No.37, 1975, Eritrea, No.81 1979, Namibia No.83 1979, Nicaragua, No. 105 1981, Angola, No.152 1985, Eritrea, No.220 1991; British servicewomen

Merryfinch, in a four page article under the headline 'Equality in the Army - No Way!', wrote that her reaction to British servicewomen was one of:

'anger, sorrow and pity ... ang[er] at the terrible force of false promises which lured them into wanting to join up ... [sadness] to see them caught up in that most patriarchal of structures and blinded to what that [was] doing to them as women ... and pity for them because ... you [could not] automatically leave by giving notice'.⁹⁸

The following year, an article by Jan Parker highlighted the treatment of three lesbians dismissed from the army, describing the army as 'oppress[ing] women within its own ranks'.⁹⁹ This lesbian cause was another reason for criticising the armed forces. Such pressure in respect of equal opportunities as Navy Board members perceived probably came from establishment sources: the NAO Report on MOD personnel and the subsequent Public Accounts Committee report, the Equal Opportunities Commission and Parliamentary questions or letters to Ministers.¹⁰⁰

In the WRNS Directorate, Commandant Anthea Larken was disappointed with Alan West's recommendations. She and her deputy, Chief Officer Rosie Wilson, thought the WRNS could not survive as a shore-based service. They took NAO criticism seriously.¹⁰¹ However, with just five support ships recommended for women, there would be 'too few opportunities to permit a balanced development of female seagoing expertise and experience' and this would 'inhibit progress on integration' of the WRNS into the Royal Navy.¹⁰²

articles: No.104, 1981 'Equality in the Army - No Way!', No.119 1982, 'What the Women's Army is Really Like - from the inside'.

⁹⁸ Lesley Merryfinch, *Spare Rib*, No.104, Mar 1981. The article was written in the context of rumours of conscription for women in some NATO countries and weapons training for women in the British army.

⁹⁹ Jan Parker, *Spare Rib*, No.119, Jun 1982, 'What the Women's Army is Really Like - from the inside'.

¹⁰⁰ For NAO and Public Accounts Committee see FOI MOD: Navy Board, Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, Second Sea Lord, Jan 1990. In 1990, the Equal Opportunities Commission took up cases of two former servicewomen who had been dismissed because of pregnancy. (Equal Opportunities Commission, *Annual Report 1990*, (London: HMSO, 1990), p.15). (See Chapter 7).

¹⁰¹ Larken, interviewed by author, 29 March 2010, transcript pp.20-21; Chief Officer (later Commander) Wilson, interviewed by author 4 Jun 2007, transcript pp.5-7.

¹⁰² FOI Fleet: Correspondence: 'Study into the Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN', Director WRNS to Head of NMT, 3 Oct 1989.

Anthea Larken knew that Wrens themselves were divided on seagoing.¹⁰³ A survey conducted by Alan West's study team in 1988/89 confirmed her judgement. Of 298 ratings who responded, 147 replied that they would go to sea, 113 would not and 38 were undecided. Officers were more evenly split: 26 replied 'yes', 24 opted for 'no' and 5 were 'undecided'.¹⁰⁴ Wrens were women who had joined a shore-based organisation. It was not surprising that many would not volunteer for seagoing. Some would already be too senior in rank to make a successful transition. More important was the attitude of potential recruits. Evidence presented to Alan West suggested interest in seagoing opportunities.¹⁰⁵

Overturning Exclusion from Warships

Archie Hamilton read Alan West's report and was unimpressed by the Navy's 'toe in the water' approach compared with bolder moves by the RAF and army.¹⁰⁶ At the suggestion of Commander Roy Clare (his military assistant), he visited a Dutch frigate.¹⁰⁷ The Dutch Navy had had women at sea in warships for about ten years. It had ocean-going capability and its mixed-crew ships performed well in operational training which was run by the Royal Navy from Portland. The gap between Dutch experience and Alan West's recommendations was apparent to Hamilton.¹⁰⁸ He could not understand why the Royal Navy accepted 'substandard men' while turning away 'good women'.¹⁰⁹ The Navy was perceived as being left behind.¹¹⁰

With Brian Brown resistant to wider seagoing, Admiral Oswald was in a difficult position. Maintenance of good relations with Ministers was important to Service chiefs. Rightly or wrongly, it was perceived as influential in the share of resources allocated to the Services in annual budget negotiations.¹¹¹ Admiral Oswald's relationship with Tom King, the Secretary of State, was already strained over a press

¹⁰³ Larken, interviewed by author, 29 March 2010, transcript p.24.

¹⁰⁴ West Report, Annex M.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.5.

¹⁰⁶ Rear Admiral Roy Clare interviewed by author, 9 Mar 2011, transcript p.5.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.5.

¹⁰⁸ NMRN Oral History Collection: Lord Hamilton interviewed by Katy Elliott, track 4 and Clare, transcript p.5.

¹⁰⁹ Hamilton, interviewed by author, transcript p.7.

¹¹⁰ Clare, transcript p.6 and Rear Admiral John Lippiett interviewed by the author, 4 Apr 2011, transcript p.6.

¹¹¹ Clare, transcript p.10; Wilkinson, transcript p.10.

article.¹¹² He was unlikely to want to lose ground also with Archie Hamilton, compared with RAF and army counterparts.

Meanwhile, Admiral Oswald was encouraged to open warships to women by the two captains who worked on his personal staff. Captain Lippiett, who accompanied him on visits to naval establishments, took him to visit female reservists who already went to sea for training weekends.¹¹³ Captain Wilkinson sounded out officers in the Naval staff and told Admiral Oswald that 'basically, people thought that if we were going to do it, do it properly and get on with it.'¹¹⁴

The unresolved problem was government policy which precluded women from serving in combat roles. In 1988, Roger Freeman (Under Secretary of State for the Armed Forces) stated twice in the House of Commons that women should not be in 'direct combat'.¹¹⁵ This had become akin to a reflex response when discussing servicewomen's employment. Whatever was changing, the threshold of combat was said not to have been crossed. Some respondents to the West report thought the time had come to seek political guidance on what was acceptable. Was the defining characteristic the use of weapons, the risk of becoming a casualty or some geographic reference to a 'combat zone'?¹¹⁶ In November 1989, Archie Hamilton challenged the existence of a formal policy that excluded women from combat roles.¹¹⁷ The oft quoted position was subsequently described in the Navy Board paper on employment of the WRNS as a 'precept' rather than a 'policy'.¹¹⁸ Exclusion of women from warships as a matter of principle that they should not undertake combat roles appeared to have weak foundations.

¹¹² Wilkinson, transcript p.10.

¹¹³ Lippiett, transcript, pp.7-8.

¹¹⁴ Wilkinson, transcript p.7.

¹¹⁵ HC Deb, 6th Series, Vol.132, Col.197, 26 April 1988 (in response to a question on whether the RAF would employ female pilots) and Vol.138, Col.1107, 20 October 1988 ('no' to pilots again, but noting that women would fly in airborne early warning aircraft as rear crew).

¹¹⁶ FOI Fleet: Correspondence: 'Study into the Employment of WRNS Personnel in the Royal Navy', AUS(NP) to Head of NMT, 16 Aug 1989, DN Plans and Programmes to Head of NMT, 27 Sep 1989, DGST(N) to Head of NMT, 2 Oct 1989 and Nav Sec to Head of NMT, Sep 1989; FOI Fleet: Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, FONAC to Head of NMT, 21 Sep 1989.

¹¹⁷ FOI Fleet: Employment of Women in Combat, minute to Army Historical Branch, 20 Nov 1989.

¹¹⁸ FOI Fleet: Employment of Women in Combat, brief for Minister for the Armed Forces, 1 Dec 1989, handwritten annotation; FOI MOD: Navy Board, Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, Second Sea Lord, Jan 1990.

Roy Clare suggested that Admiral Oswald could 'see which way the political wind was blowing', but he had to manage the Navy Board to bring about agreement.¹¹⁹ On this controversial issue it was important for the Board to be united. It fell to Rear Admiral Neville Purvis to brief Board members individually. He presented a threefold case. First, the Navy was short of skilled men while the WRNS had no difficulty in attracting high quality recruits. Second, 'it seem[ed] highly probable that there [would] be pressure in the future to relinquish a WRNS with no seagoing function'.¹²⁰ Finally, he thought it would be better for the Navy to make this decision on its own terms rather than having it imposed through 'political correctness'.¹²¹

Persuaded to accept the idea of women serving in warships, Admiral Brown wrote a Navy Board paper which presented a cogent case for seagoing, with integration of women into the Royal Navy to follow in the medium term. He based sea service predominantly on the Navy's needs, with brief reference to equality of opportunity for women. He described demographic trends as 'adverse' but 'not of themselves disabling'.¹²² He referred to 'economic and social conditions inhibit[ing] recruiting and encouraging restiveness among serving personnel'.¹²³ He observed that 'Greater risks in male recruiting quality [were] being contemplated at a time when there [was] no shortage of women of high quality who wish[ed] to join'.¹²⁴ Thus, he argued, women would improve both quantity and quality, representing 'a real improvement for manning'.¹²⁵ In approving the paper, the Navy Board decided that there were two co-equal aims: 'to meet manning needs, and to improve the prospects for equal opportunities for the WRNS'.¹²⁶ The Navy Board was persuaded to support the policy unanimously.

The precept that women should not serve in combat was set aside in a letter from Archie Hamilton to Margaret Thatcher and a short reply from her secretary saying

¹¹⁹ Clare, transcript p.5.

¹²⁰ Purvis, transcript pp.14-15.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² FOI MOD: Navy Board, Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, Second Sea Lord, Jan 1990.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ FOI MOD: WRNS Study - NAVB(I) 11 Jan 90, minute to Navy Board members, Secretary to First Sea Lord, 15 Jan 1990.

that she was content.¹²⁷ The Queen's approval was also sought. Hamilton regarded his approach as pragmatic. He did not claim to champion equality of opportunity. Indeed, he thought he was perfectly capable of resisting any such pressure. He feared reactionary Conservative MPs would cause trouble, but anticipated less difficulty with the Labour opposition who would be obliged to accept the equal opportunities case.¹²⁸ He announced the decision in the House of Commons on 5 February 1990, saying that he was 'sure that the service [would] rise to meet the challenge' – a phrase he regretted, as it prompted ribald remarks.¹²⁹ It was hardly surprising that a largely male House of Commons perceived a sexual connotation to Hamilton's words. The sexual aspect of men and women serving together in the confines of ships was a theme readily taken up by the media and played immediately on the fears of sailors' wives.

Flying Policies

In common with NATO allies, in the late 1980s the RAF faced a shortage of aircrew. Although pilot recruiting targets were met, quality was declining and failure rates in training increasing. Retention of experienced men was even more problematic. The percentage opting to leave at break points in contracts rose from 28% to 38% between 1987 and 1989. In addition, applications to leave the RAF early reached a five-year high in 1989. The situation with navigators was worse. This specialisation was largely populated by men who had failed selection for pilot or did not make the grade in pilot training. Only 10% of navigators made the specialisation their first choice. The RAF missed its target for newly qualified navigators in all but one year in the 1980s.¹³⁰

Meanwhile, squadron establishments were due to rise from 1991 when NATO policy of increasing crew to aircraft ratio from 1.2:1 to 1.5:1 was due to come into

¹²⁷ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/002 Part A, Employment of Women's Royal Naval Service Personnel, Minister for the Armed Forces to Prime Minister, 29 Jan 1990 and Employment of Women's Royal Naval Service Personnel, Private Secretary/Prime Minister to Private Secretary/Minister for the Armed Forces, 30 Jan 1990.

¹²⁸ Lord Hamilton/author telephone interview, 17 May 2007 and NMRN: Lord Archie Hamilton of Epsom interviewed by Katy Elliott, 4 Jul 2006, accession number 2006.65, track 5.

¹²⁹ HC Deb, 6th Series, Vol.166, Col.734, 5 Feb 1990. Reaction recollected by Aldred, transcript p.4 and by Hamilton, interviewed by Katy Elliott, NMRN Oral History Collection, track 14.

¹³⁰ FOI AHB: Female Aircrew in the RAF, Air Vice Marshal Honey, paper, 1 Mar 1989.

effect.¹³¹ Possible solutions discussed at a NATO conference in 1988 included improving terms and conditions of service to aid retention, reducing overall requirement by cutting office jobs and increasing recruiting targets.¹³² However, the RAF could not compete on pay and conditions with civilian airlines and North Sea oil operators. Increasing the targets was not going to solve the problem of quality of entrants.

Work on the idea of female aircrew started in the Air Secretary's department in the mid-1980s. It was seen as a way of increasing the recruiting base. Initially there was a lack of progress. Government policy that women were not employed in combat was assumed to prevent any such initiative because the RAF recruited on the basis of aptitude to 'discharge all roles - combat and non-combat'.¹³³ If women were to be employed, either the restriction on women's employment or the RAF's approach to recruitment of pilots would have to be abandoned. It was the recruiting policy which was set aside to accommodate female aircrew in a 1989 decision to allow women to fly aircraft designated as non-combat.

The author of the paper for the Air Force Board was given a strong public hint of the new Chief of Air Staff's view. In an interview for *RAF News* in January 1989, Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Harding praised women flying with University Air Squadrons, lamented that they could not join the RAF as pilots, and promised it would be considered.¹³⁴ A few weeks later, a draft paper was circulated for comment. It recorded accumulated evidence in favour. The USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands all had female pilots. The RAF already employed women in some rear crew roles. Female undergraduates were now proving their aptitude at University Air Squadrons. There was growing pressure for change from these women and from external bodies such as the National Audit Office and the Equal Opportunities Commission.¹³⁵ Air Vice Marshal Bob Honey (Air Secretary, responsible for career management) suggested that aircrew roles for women would

¹³¹ FOI AHB: ID6/1006, Conference on Pilot Shortages, 21 Dec 1988.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Air Vice Marshal Tony Mason, e-mail to author, 30 Sep 2012.

¹³⁴ *RAF News*, 20 January 1989, p.1.

¹³⁵ FOI AHB: Female Aircrew in the RAF, Air Vice Marshal Honey, paper, 1 Mar 1989.

enhance 'the Service's reputation as an equal opportunities employer'.¹³⁶ He recommended women be employed as pilots and navigators in unarmed aircraft and as flying instructors. This limited approach was also seen as a means of gaining experience of recruiting, training and employing women as aircrew.¹³⁷

Dissenting views were expressed by Air Commodore Profit (Inspector of Flight Safety) and Air Vice Marshal Roger Austin (Director General Aircraft). Profit argued for improving men's terms and conditions or employment of male senior NCOs.¹³⁸ Austin expressed his opposition in emotive terms, saying that he had tried but probably failed to set aside male chauvinism. He rejected claims which might be made for equal opportunities, arguing that '[our] requirements are special (hence ... we are still allowed to reject homosexuals even though most other occupations cannot).'¹³⁹ If the case was associated with a shortage of men, he preferred to improve men's terms of service. He ended by supposing that women aircrew would be a reality sooner or later. But he thought he would be retired by then and could rest content that 'my air force [was] awake and alert - and powdering its nose as it admire[d] Robert Redford and Tom Jones on the Flight Safety calendar.'¹⁴⁰

Some of those in favour thought the recommendation did not go far enough. Having just visited Cambridge University Air Squadron, where a female member had won the top prize for flying, Air Commodore Tim Garden foresaw problems if a woman came top in Basic Flying Training but was assigned a lesser role than men. He wanted to seek Ministerial approval for women to fly fast jets.¹⁴¹ Air Vice Marshal Eric Macey (Director General Training) suggested adding air defence combat jets and reconnaissance aircraft to the list – thus drawing a line short of offensive action.¹⁴² Air Commodore Farrer, Director of Air Defence, could not understand why women should be '[confined] to roles in which they [could] be shot at but

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Female Aircrew in the RAF', Air Commodore Profit to Director Air Staff Briefing and Co-ordination, 14 Mar 1989.

¹³⁹ Ibid, Air Vice Marshal Austin to Director Air Staff Briefing and Co-ordination, 13 Mar 1989.

Roger Austin went on to become Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Systems) in the rank of air marshal.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, Air Commodore Garden to Director Air Staff Briefing and Co-ordination, 8 Mar 1989.

¹⁴² Ibid, Air Vice Marshal Macey to Air Secretary, 21 Mar 1989.

[could] not themselves shoot back.'¹⁴³ Air Vice Marshal Mills, Director General Medical Services, argued a practical point which interchanged 'excluded' and 'included' aircraft types. He thought that, as 'size for size and weight for weight women have less strength than men', they might be more suited to fast jets than to 'larger and heavier aircraft with a potential for asymmetric and other problems of control'.¹⁴⁴

Air Vice Marshal Honey's paper glossed over women's potential short period of service compared with men which even those in favour of its recommendation observed. The key concern was that women would leave early due to pregnancy as the intention was to retain compulsory discharge. However, it was proposed that female aircrew could be 'allowed to complete at least their obligatory service sometime after childbirth'.¹⁴⁵ This was questioned both by those who favoured female aircrew and those opposed. Air Vice Marshal Mills, a proponent, queried the coupling of 'allowed' and 'obligatory' in the same statement. He counselled against being dogmatic because 'Women's reactions to the fact of motherhood [could] be unpredictable', with 'postnatal attitudes' potentially different from 'antenatal intentions'. But he thought pregnancy was 'unlikely to be a notable factor with the highly motivated young women' who would initially volunteer to train as aircrew.¹⁴⁶ Air Vice Marshal Roger Austin doubted that the RAF would be able to insist on return after childbirth unless a childcare allowance was paid or crèche facilities established.¹⁴⁷ His line was supported by another opponent, Air Commodore Profit.¹⁴⁸ Other officers who favoured female aircrew, but queried the idea of encouraging mothers to return to complete their service, included Air Commodore Peter Beer (Director of Air Plans), Air Commodore David Cousins (Director for Air Offensive issues) and Air Vice Marshal Hann (Director General Personnel

¹⁴³ Ibid, Air Commodore Farrer to Director Air Staff Briefing and Co-ordination, 13 Mar 1989.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, Air Vice Marshal Mills to Air Secretary, 30 Mar 1989. Engine failure or damage to control surfaces could result in unusual (asymmetric) forces on the aircraft that required the pilot to exert greater than normal effort to operate the controls.

¹⁴⁵ FOI AHB: Female Aircrew in the RAF, Air Vice Marshal Honey, paper, 1 Mar 1989.

¹⁴⁶ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Female Aircrew in the RAF', Air Vice Marshal Mills to Air Secretary, 30 Mar 1989.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, Air Vice Marshal Austin to Director Air Staff Briefing and Co-ordination, 13 Mar 1989.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, Air Commodore Profit to Director Air Staff Briefing and Co-ordination, 14 Mar 1989.

Services).¹⁴⁹ Rather than making a clear statement on how she thought terms of service should be changed, Air Commodore Shirley Jones (Director WRAF) responded that she would be 'interested to know how best these [could] be resolved'.¹⁵⁰ Air Vice Marshal John Thomson (Assistant Chief of the Air Staff from March 1989) added further criticism that, rather than being safe from poaching from other employers, women were more likely to leave than men. He based his argument on data from the United States Air Force.¹⁵¹

John Thomson had a more fundamental problem with the basic argument of Honey's paper that female aircrew would help to alleviate concerns about the quality of applicants for aircrew roles. His particular concern was the fast jet force. The paper suggested that women would replace male candidates who achieved the lowest scores in aptitude tests. Although aptitude scores were not an exact predictor of subsequent success in training, these men were more likely than the high scoring candidates to fail training, as 1 in 3 men did at this time, or be assigned to multi-engine or rotary wing aircraft.¹⁵² Men who performed best in training were selected for fast jet roles or 'creamed off' to become instructors for a tour of duty, before later transferring to an operational squadron. High quality female candidates would not be eligible for fast jet squadrons, though the intention was that the best could be selected as instructors. Thomson observed that these rules implied that the quality of pilots and navigators for the fast jet force would not be improved, as only the occasional selection of a woman for flying instructor duties would replace a man of fast jet standard. However, he was not in favour of a bolder policy. He felt 'an underlying unease at the anthropological and psychological factors concerning women and combat and the further effects on male colleagues and the civilian population of placing them at risk.'¹⁵³ He urged the need to 'differentiate between

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, Air Commodore Beer to Director Air Staff Briefing and Co-ordination, 14 Mar 1989, Air Commodore Cousins to Director Air Staff Briefing and Co-ordination, 16 Mar 1989 and Air Vice Marshal Hann to Air Secretary, 28 Mar 1989.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, Air Commodore Jones to Air Secretary, 28 Mar 1989.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, Assistant Chief of Air Staff to Air Secretary, 28 Mar 1989. John Thomson went on to be Commander-in-Chief Support Command and Commander-in-Chief Strike Command, reaching the rank of Air Chief Marshal. He died in July 1994 at the age of 53, shortly after taking up a NATO post.

¹⁵² FOI AHB: Female Aircrew in the RAF, Air Vice Marshal Honey, paper, 1 Mar 1989.

¹⁵³ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Female Aircrew in the RAF', Assistant Chief of Air Staff to Air Secretary, 28 Mar 1989.

women's ability to fly high performance aircraft in peace ... and the appropriateness of commanding them to kill and be killed in action.¹⁵⁴

A revised paper, sponsored by Air Marshal Sir Laurence Jones (Air Member for Personnel) went to the Air Force Board Standing Committee in June.¹⁵⁵ Despite John Thomson's complaints about inconsistencies in the paper, this final version was substantially the same as the earlier draft.¹⁵⁶ The minutes of the meeting focussed on the acceptable list of aircraft, the status of support helicopters being the contentious issue. As Chinook and Puma helicopters were used in close support of land forces they were deemed to operate too close to potential action for women to be involved. They were deleted from the list. The meeting approved women to serve as aircrew in non-weapon carrying or dropping aircraft. They were to form up to 10% of annual intakes for pilots and navigators, starting from 1 April 1990. New terms of service were to be agreed with the Treasury.¹⁵⁷ As one of his last actions before handing over to Tom King, George Younger gave approval on 19 July.¹⁵⁸ From circulation of the draft policy paper to approval by Ministers took under five months.

RN and Army Air Corps Developments

Having overturned the combat exclusion with its seagoing policy, the Navy Board returned to flying, where the Fleet Air Arm was operating with a shortfall of 16% of its pilot complement. Vice Admiral Sir Brian Brown was keen to have 'consistent criteria throughout the Naval Service on the extent to which women should be involved in combat'.¹⁵⁹ However, he did not want to 'prejudice the achievement of tri-Service agreement on combat in non-seagoing contexts'.¹⁶⁰ Mindful of the RAF's reluctance to have female combat pilots, he suggested that Sea Harrier squadrons remain for men only. These were the Navy's fighter aircraft which operated from

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ FOI MOD: AFBSC(89)11 Female Aircrew in the Royal Air Force, Air Member for Personnel, Jun 1989.

¹⁵⁶ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Female Aircrew in the RAF', Director Air Staff Briefing and Co-ordination to SO to Assistant Chief of the Air Staff, 16 Jun 1989.

¹⁵⁷ FOI AHB: ID3/A/18/1 Part 3, Minutes of Air Force Board Standing Committee Meeting, 27 Jun 1989.

¹⁵⁸ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Female Aircrew in the RAF', APS to Secretary of State to APS to Under Secretary of State (Armed Forces), 19 Jul 1989. See Appendix 5 for the list of approved aircraft and roles.

¹⁵⁹ FOI Fleet: Employment of Female Aircrew in the RN, Second Sea Lord, Oct 1990.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

carriers. He thought women's roles could be extended to helicopters operating over battle areas on land. However, as the army was reviewing the employment of women in the Army Air Corps, it was sensible to wait.¹⁶¹ Female naval aviators would be employed in anti-submarine warfare, so the Board's approval of the proposal in December 1990 again pushed the combat boundary.¹⁶² Thus the Navy took account of the limits of RAF and army policies while pressing on with its own new policy on women's roles.

Women were to join the Army Air Corps as ground crew from 1991.¹⁶³ As the army's non-commissioned aircrew were selected from ground crew, this move opened the way for women. It was also agreed in principle that women were to be eligible to join directly as officer aircrew. However, an implementation date was not set, as the Director of the Army Air Corps was reported to be reluctant to take this step.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, due to a shortage of male aircrew, the army was expected to have women flying Gazelle and subsequently Lynx support helicopters. This would imply operational duty in Northern Ireland. The plan had been endorsed by Ministers.¹⁶⁵

Updating his Air Force Board colleagues on these developments, Air Marshal Sir David Parry-Evans (Air Member for Personnel in place of Laurence Jones) concluded that the RAF should look at widening women's employment. He confessed to 'a slight unease'.¹⁶⁶ Unease also seemed to be behind the remarks of Air Commodore Squire (Director of Air Offensive), who thought that the RAF would be unable to 'hold the line' in respect of policy on aircrew for helicopters.¹⁶⁷ He clearly had doubts about the wisdom of female pilots in offensive roles, remarking that as there were two pilots, it would be 'always possible to have a male pilot in every cockpit'.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² FOI Fleet: NAVB P(91)4 Post Options Restructuring of the RN (extract), 22 Mar 1991.

¹⁶³ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Employment of Female Aircrew', Air Member for Personnel to Air Force Board Colleagues, 21 Dec 1990.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, Air Commodore Squire to SO to Assistant Chief of Air Staff, 3 Jan 1991.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Ending Flying Restrictions in the RAF

The RAF had to review policy on women aircrew before non-combat flying policy had time to take effect.¹⁶⁹ Air Marshal Sir Roger Palin, the next Air Member for Personnel, put a further paper on women aircrew to Air Force Board Standing Committee colleagues in July 1991. He stated there were only two legal grounds for continuing to exclude women from a role. The first was that they would have an adverse impact on military operations. The second was statutory health and safety reasons.¹⁷⁰ However, the Navy had Ministerial approval to employ women in all its aircraft, including Sea Harrier combat jets. Army Air Corps policy would also put women into combat zones. Consequently, he recommended immediate opening of support helicopter roles and maritime patrol aircraft. He stopped short of combat jets, suggesting instead that the experience of other countries should be investigated. He described this move as 'put[ting] our own house in order before find[ing] ourselves forced down possibly less welcome routes'.¹⁷¹ This latter remark seemed to imply a desire to maintain exclusion from combat jets. It was the only additional route not yet proposed.

Roger Palin's line was recognised as indefensible in the light of developments in the other Services by all but one reply to his paper.¹⁷² Remarking that it would be seen as 'too little, too late', Deputy Controller Aircraft speculated that the policy would fall to the first Parliamentary Question on the subject.¹⁷³ Tim Garden, now Assistant Chief of Air Staff, continued his previous support for unrestricted flying. He opposed the step-by-step approach claiming that it 'promote[d] the idea that we are entrenched male chauvinists – hardly ideal for the Service that should be most forward thinking'.¹⁷⁴ He thought that 'Ministers have moved rather more quickly than the military in their acceptance of women on combat duties'.¹⁷⁵ Moray Stewart (Second Parliamentary Under Secretary) urged the opening of all roles to 'widen the

¹⁶⁹ The first women to complete training only joined squadrons in 1991. See Chapter 7.

¹⁷⁰ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Employment of Female Aircrew', Air Member for Personnel to Air Force Board Colleagues, 3 Jul 1991.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² A short note from Controller Aircraft's office stated he was content (Ibid, PSO to Controller Aircraft to PSO to Air Member for Personnel, 5 July 1991). This was similar to the brief note in response to the 1989 paper and suggests a lack of engagement on the subject.

¹⁷³ Ibid, Deputy Controller Aircraft to Air Member for Personnel, 5 Jul 1991.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, Assistant Chief of Air Staff to Air Member for Personnel, 5 Jul 1991.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

recruiting base' and to remove 'this contentious subject from the sex discrimination arena'.¹⁷⁶

The decision to open all flying roles to women was taken in principle at a meeting of the Air Force Board Standing Committee in September 1991. As an immediate step, support helicopter roles and maritime patrol aircraft roles were approved and Air Marshal Palin was asked to produce a paper on fast jet roles 'taking into account the legal position'.¹⁷⁷

This final paper in the sequence was sent to Board members on 27 November 1991 and it was circulated within the Air Force Department at MOD. Roger Palin included an annex which attempted to assess women's effectiveness as combatants. It named historical examples starting from Boadicea. It mentioned female Soviet fighter pilots in World War II but dismissed them as 'few and far between'.¹⁷⁸ It went on to say that Israel excluded women from combat because previously their presence had prevented men from 'operat[ing] with the necessary ruthlessness'.¹⁷⁹ It observed that Britain now had armed policewomen but thought there was a difference between 'confronting a criminal and an enemy'.¹⁸⁰ The annex tried to draw a distinction between the types of combat at a distance, that had already been approved, from the combat experience of fast jet crews. It claimed that the latter 'involv[ed] a more intimate contact with the enemy than is the case ... [in] dropping torpedoes or depth bombs against an unseen submarine'.¹⁸¹ It concluded with two risks. The first was uncertainty over how women would react in combat. The second was whether women would have a 'deleterious effect on their male counterparts'.¹⁸² In the text of the paper, Air Marshal Palin argued that it would be difficult to make a legal case for excluding women from combat jets in the absence of firm evidence that they could not do the job. Also, such a stance had been undermined by 'our own

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 2nd Permanent Under Secretary to Air Member for Personnel, 19 Jul 1991.

¹⁷⁷ FOI AHB: Air Force Board Standing Committee, Conclusions of Meeting 8(91) held on 24 Sep 1991 (extract).

¹⁷⁸ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Employment of Female Aircrew', Air Member for Personnel to Air Force Board Colleagues, 27 Nov 1991.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

and our sister Services' decisions to open other combat roles to women.¹⁸³ He concluded that fast jet roles should be opened to women.

Again, Air Marshal Palin's paper attracted criticism. Air Commodore Barnes, Director of Public Relations, commented that he would have 'preferred a more positive approach, "why we should do it" rather than "are there sufficient reasons not to"'.¹⁸⁴ Air Commodore Bagnall, (on the staff of the Assistant Chief of Air Staff) thought the paper 'underplay[ed] the strengths of "today's woman"'.¹⁸⁵ He went on 'women are at least as strong and resilient in character as their male counterparts and I have no doubt that they would ... be equally capable in air combat situations'.¹⁸⁶ He called the paper's annex 'patronising'.

Roger Palin defended his paper on the grounds that he had to 'cover the concerns that we know some senior officers feel and indeed, have voiced'.¹⁸⁷ He had a supporter in the former Assistant Chief of Air Staff and now Commander-in-Chief of Support Command, Air Marshal Sir John Thomson. Thomson would have preferred time for the first female aircrew to reach operational service before taking this step. He thought the subject 'merited further reflection and discussion' and that the paper's annex 'represented a relevant starting point'.¹⁸⁸ Far from seeing the annex as a starting point, Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Harding asked for it to be withdrawn.¹⁸⁹ Palin agreed, mentioning that he had just attended a British Military Studies Group Seminar on women's roles in the armed forces and he was now 'persuaded that some of the more negative views expressed have their foundation in myth rather than in reality'.¹⁹⁰ Further, he did not wish 'future historians to look back and assume that the decision was taken solely on a negative view of operational factors'.¹⁹¹

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, Director of Public Relations to PSO to Assistant Chief of Air Staff, 2 Dec 1991.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, Air Commodore Bagnall to PSO to Assistant Chief of Air Staff, 28 Nov 1991.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, Air Member for Personnel to Assistant Chief of Air Staff, 6 Dec 1991.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, Air Marshal Sir John Thomson to Air Marshal Sir Roger Palin, 2 Dec 1991.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, PSO to Chief of Air Staff to Air Member for Personnel, 6 Dec 1991.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, Air Member for Personnel to Assistant Chief of Air Staff, 6 Dec 1991.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Continuing Exclusions

Ground Combat - Royal Marines and RAF Regiment

As the army did not open land warfare roles to women, there was no pressure on the Navy or the RAF to end exclusion of women from the Royal Marines or RAF Regiment. However, following the decision to open seagoing, the Navy Board asked Lieutenant General Sir Martin Garrod (Commandant General Royal Marines) to examine the extent to which he could employ women.¹⁹² This resulted only in women's admission to the Royal Marine Band. 'Bandsmen' had medical orderly roles in war and it was agreed that women could perform such duties.¹⁹³

The RAF Regiment's case was less clear cut. Its function was airfield defence rather than the more mobile, offensive role of the Marines. The Regiment had two main components at the time: Rapier squadrons for anti-aircraft defence and field squadrons which provided ground troops for defence of airfields. Army policy was applied to the latter as the role of field squadrons was deemed akin to infantry. However, women could potentially perform air defence tasks. Nevertheless, this was retained as a male preserve on the grounds that the RAF Regiment was too small to allow for a cohort of personnel which could only carry out a limited set of roles.¹⁹⁴ The extent to which men actually switched between roles was not mentioned.

Submarines

Having interpreted his terms of reference as excluding women in combat roles, Alan West did not include analysis of submarine service in his report. However, he noted that women were eligible to serve in submarines in Norway, though few did so in 1988. Denmark had also approved submarine service in principle but implementation was in abeyance until the next generation of submarines was built.¹⁹⁵

Papers examining the suitability of submarine service for women were produced for the Navy Board in 1993 and 1998. Initial thinking was that the Navy should gain

¹⁹² FOI MOD: Navy Board, Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, Second Sea Lord, Jan 1990.

¹⁹³ FOI Fleet: FPMG(SP) 5/98 Review of Women's Employment Opportunities in the Armed Forces, 13 Feb 1998. By 1998 there were eighteen women 'bandsmen' plus a further twelve in training.

¹⁹⁴ IWM Sound Archive: Accession Number 28418, Sir Peter Harding, Sep 2005, track 40.

¹⁹⁵ West Report, Annex E.

further experience of employing women in surface ships before considering the more demanding submarine environment.¹⁹⁶ Evidence was then collected from the Institute of Naval Medicine on foetal health, a female officer who spent a week at sea in a submarine, and from focus groups of women of all ranks who had served in ships.¹⁹⁷ The 1998 paper, which included a summary of the 1993 findings, remained against women's employment in submarines. There was no doubting the position of the author who introduced his report with a quote from Horace which translates as: 'So that what is a beautiful woman on top ends in a black and ugly fish.'¹⁹⁸

Arguments were based on living conditions, health, psychological and social issues, and personnel planning problems.

Submarines had many more constraints on living conditions compared with surface ships. They always went to sea with a full complement and sometimes with additional personnel for training purposes. In consequence, there were insufficient bunks. It was standard practice in *Trafalgar* and *Vanguard* classes of submarines for some crew members to 'hot bunk'¹⁹⁹, or sleep in camp beds in weapons' storage areas. If women were to have a self-contained sleeping area and ablutions, as in surface ships, there would be a net reduction in space for bunks. The alternative of shared accommodation, accepted in Norway's navy, was deemed unacceptable in British culture.²⁰⁰

A key uncertainty concerned women's health and the possibility of a woman being in the early stages of pregnancy. Acceptable radiation and atmospheric pollutant levels were derived from national health and safety regulations. However, unlike industrial workers, submariners lived in the environment as well as working in it. If

¹⁹⁶ FOI Fleet: Mixed Gender Manning of Submarines: a feasibility study - annex on 1993 report, Flag Officer Submarines, 31 Mar 1998.

¹⁹⁷ FOI Fleet: Mixed Manning in Submarines: Foetal Health, Institute of Naval Medicine, Dec 1997 and Mixed Gender Manning of Submarines: a feasibility study, Flag Officer Submarines, 31 Mar 1998; FOI MOD: Women in Submarines Feasibility Study: Focus Groups reports, Defence Analytical Services, Jan 1998.

¹⁹⁸ FOI Fleet: Mixed Gender Manning of Submarines: a feasibility study, Flag Officer Submarines, 31 Mar 1998. Translation of Horace, *Ars Poetica*, from Elizabeth Knowles (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 7th edition), p.408.

¹⁹⁹ Hot bunking meant two men were assigned the same bunk. Working alternate shifts, the off duty man slept in the bunk.

²⁰⁰ FOI Fleet: Mixed Gender Manning of Submarines: a feasibility study, Flag Officer Submarines, 31 Mar 1998, Annex A - Conclusions and Recommendations from 1993 Feasibility Study and Lippiett, transcript p.8 on attitudes towards privacy.

a woman was pregnant, the potential harmful effects on a developing foetus of continuous exposure for up to ninety days was unknown. There was also concern that a medical emergency, such as ectopic pregnancy or miscarriage, would be beyond the experience of on-board medical staff.²⁰¹ It was not evident from the paper whether these risks were worse than emergencies which might occur for any crew member.

Psychological and social aspects of submarine service were also considered. Serving in nuclear-powered, ocean-going submarines was regarded as more demanding than coastal patrolling as in Norwegian service. Nuclear-powered submarines spent more time submerged because they did not have to surface regularly like conventionally-powered submarines which had to refresh their atmosphere. Nuclear-armed submarines routinely spent twelve weeks submerged.²⁰² Their crews could only receive family messages weekly and they could not reply. Incoming messages were limited to forty words, were vetted ashore before transmission and again by the submarine's captain to ensure that they contained no distressing news.²⁰³ There was a fear that women would not adapt to this isolation. In addition, there was recognition that relationships could form between crew members or there could be unwelcome sexual advances. Putting a crew member ashore to defuse an inappropriate, deteriorating or unwelcome relationship, the solution used in the surface fleet, would not be available during a long submarine patrol.²⁰⁴

Personnel planning was more complex for submarines than for surface ships. A full complement was achieved through use of an emergency relief pool of men who could be assigned at short notice if a crew member had to be withdrawn before a patrol started. To generate this surplus of trained manpower, men were directed into submarine service. The Navy would have preferred to avoid compulsion, but was unable to attract enough volunteers. Findings from a very limited set of focus group meetings of Navy women suggested that there would also be insufficient female volunteers to sustain jobs assigned to women. This judgement was shared by

²⁰¹ FOI Fleet: Mixed Gender Manning of Submarines: a feasibility study, Flag Officer Submarines, 31 Mar 1998. Only nuclear-armed submarines carried a doctor; others had a medical assistant.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

Lieutenant Hutchings, a female officer who went to sea for a week in a *Trafalgar* class submarine as part of the research for the 1998 paper. It was thought that the possibility of compulsory service in submarines could deter women from staying in the Navy or, indeed, from joining.²⁰⁵

Presenting findings to the Navy Board, Admiral Sir John Brigstocke (Second Sea Lord) said he thought accommodation (other than cost of modifications) was not an issue. Nor did he think that normal radiation levels posed a threat. He was not convinced by arguments about the potential for sexual harassment. However, he shared reservations about potential health risks for pregnant women from atmospheric pollutants. Board members agreed that the most compelling argument against opening submarines to women was the difficulties of managing crew complements and the likelihood of compulsory rather than voluntary submarine service. The recommendation to maintain exclusion was accepted.²⁰⁶

Conclusion

There were important differences in how the RAF and RN understood participation in combat and what was acceptable for women's roles. In the RAF, all aircrew were deemed at risk of being shot down. The key question was whether women would press home an attack and kill enemies. This emphasis on belligerent action allowed a simple classification of aircraft. Combat aircraft carried weapons, those which did not were described as non-combat. The existing hierarchy of male aircrew's status, implied by selection of the best in training for fast jet training and the remainder for multi-engine or helicopter roles, made it simple to extend women's roles from previously agreed rear crew duties to pilot and navigator duties in a limited list of aircraft. Thus RAF policy-makers took a step-by-step approach although it did not address the pressing problem of the quality of crews in fast jet squadrons. Until the decision to send women to sea, the RAF was able to stay ahead of the Navy and Army in terms of its wider employment of women without having to overturn the

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. The MOD announced on 8 Dec 2011 that women would be permitted to serve in submarines. Training of officers would start in 2012 for assignments to *Vanguard* class submarines from 2013. Female ratings would start training in 2014. www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews, accessed 9 Dec 2011. It is interesting to note the intention to have female officers in submarines in advance of more junior personnel. This may be in order to circumvent problems experienced initially in warships where the absence of senior female staff was perceived as problematic.

combat exclusion. For the Navy, with all ships equipped with some weapons and difficulty in delineating risk on a geographic basis, it proved impossible to justify categorising ships as non-combat. In addition, as firing of weapons was limited to subsections of crews, the difficult point was acceptance that women would be at risk of death or injury.

The key decision was that taken by the Navy Board to open warships to women, thus overturning exclusion from combat. Rational analysis of the demands of jobs at sea, skills of women, quality of male recruits, poor retention of experienced men, examples from allied navies, and fears for the future of a shore-based WRNS, all pointed to widening women's employment. Even had there been a convincing definition of non-combat ships, sending up to 250 women to sea was not a solution to the scale of naval personnel problems. Unlike Patrick Duffy in 1978, Archie Hamilton pressed the issue with his reluctant admirals, challenging the existence of a formal government policy excluding women from combat. The Royal Navy found itself at the forefront of policy on women in combat roles because it could not match the steps taken by the other Services in extending women's employment piecemeal.

The RAF's evolutionary approach fell victim to the Navy's revolution as naval aviation opened to women. Although successive incumbents as Air Member for Personnel were reluctant to take the step of opening combat flying to women, they found themselves isolated from Air Force Board colleagues and the rising generation of air commodores and air vice marshals. With proof emerging from University Air Squadrons and early female aircrew candidates that some women met the criteria for fast jet flying, the Board conceded the need to match the Navy's bolder policy.

The new combat demarcation line was set by the army to which the other Services deferred in respect of land warfare. Language now changed again. As women could participate in direct combat in the Navy and the RAF, the Army made a distinction between this and 'close combat', in which contact might be made with the enemy face-to-face rather than confrontation being at distance.

Women's influence on these policy developments varied between the Services. The WRAF Directorate was only on the margins of the work. It was informed periodically, but it was not important in deciding the outcome. In contrast, Commandant Anthea Larken had regular access to crucial Navy Board members and, occasionally, the Minister. While she knew Wrens were divided on seagoing, she took account of threats of budget pressure on the future of her Service and made her contribution to the case for change. She could act because she still had standing as the Head of Service in a way that the Director WRAF did not.

Although the Navy Board claimed equality of opportunity for women as a co-equal aim of its policy of seagoing in warships, this did not seem to be a defining new principle during the months of considering the outcome of Alan West's study. As shown in this chapter, many senior officers raised objections to his recommendation that women serve in even a limited number of ships. Archie Hamilton, who pressed Admiral Oswald on the need to adopt the bolder policy of women serving in warships, claimed quality of recruits as the imperative rather than equality which he felt he could resist.²⁰⁷ However, alongside the aim of countering shortfalls of men, 'equality' became a means of rationalising and explaining the decision to the naval community.

Comments on flying policy developments suggest more sympathy for an equality agenda in the Air Force Department, though it seems unlikely that the RAF would have progressed swiftly to the full range of flying duties for women if left to its own devices. However, the Navy's overturning of the exclusion of women from main combat roles undermined the reason habitually quoted for not allowing women to fly fast jets. The Navy's move put pressure on the Air Force Board to respond by removing its restrictions on aircraft types that women could fly. The rising generation of RAF leaders seemed more attuned to a principle of equality than some of their seniors. As they progressed to the most senior positions, they might have taken the combat jet decision independently of policies in the other Services once evidence of women's competence as aircrew accumulated.

²⁰⁷ Lord Hamilton, telephone interview, 17 May 2007.

Chapter 7: Implementation of Seagoing and Flying Policies: Adopting a Principle of Equality

*'Why would I want to join the Navy if I didn't want to go to sea?'*¹
Un-named female applicant.

*'I had a dream that I wanted to fly'*²
Flight Lieutenant Julie Gibson - the first woman to qualify as a pilot in regular service.

In the early 1990s, the MOD planned and implemented defence cuts as a consequence of the ending of the Cold War. Concerns of the late 1980s about both the impact of the 1990s' demographic trough on recruitment and social pressures on the retention of experienced personnel were overtaken by the changed strategic environment. In 1991, the armed forces expected to reduce personnel by 18% over the following five years.³ Recruiting targets were cut and thousands of servicemen and women were made redundant. Expansion of women's participation proceeded in this wider context of defence cuts.

This chapter explores how new employment opportunities for women were implemented between 1989 and 1994 and examines what these policies reveal about the newly espoused principle of equality. It also sets out the consequences of this further integration for women's Services and their Directors. Through analysis of implementation compared with initial policy targets, it argues that the Royal Navy was more successful in meeting its objectives than the RAF. The greater change in women's employment in the Navy also had wider implications for women's terms of service than the RAF's decisions on flying roles. However, it suggests that 'equality' was intended within the limits of the Services' perception that they retained a 'right to be different' from civilian norms.⁴ It shows that external pressure was necessary before women were given terms of service that aligned with employment law.

¹ Un-named female applicant, as told by Commander Rosie Wilson, interviewed by the author, 11 Jan 2011, transcript p.9. WRNS officers adopted RN ranks from 1 December 1990. To avoid confusion, only RN rank titles are used for WRNS officers in this chapter with the exception of the Director who retained her title of Commandant.

² Flight Lieutenant Julie Gibson, interviewed by the author, 20 Jul 2010, transcript p.28. She flew Andover and Hercules aircraft.

³ *Armed Forces Pay Review Body Twentieth Report*, Cm. 1414, (London: HMSO, Jan 1991).

⁴ This perception was attributed to policy-makers, defence officials and some male officers in connection with combat policy in Dandeker and Segal, 'Gender Integration in the Armed Forces', pp.40-1. It was articulated in 1989 by Air Vice Marshal Austin who linked his opposition to female aircrew with that of exclusion of homosexuals from the armed forces (FOI AHB: Correspondence:

Implementation of Seagoing in Warships

In January 1990, the Navy Board agreed two aims for its policy on the future employment of the WRNS, describing them as co-equal. The first was to cut the manpower (meant literally) deficit which then stood at 2,000 posts ashore and 300 at sea.⁵ The second was to 'improve the prospects for equal opportunities for the WRNS'.⁶ These aims were to be achieved by employing women in warships and opening up roles from which they had been previously excluded.⁷

Captain Tim England, an engineer, was assigned to lead an implementation team. He had a long list of tasks to be tackled: terms and conditions of service; calling for and training volunteers; planning new career patterns; merger of men and women's branches; promotion regulations; uniforms, protective clothing and equipment; selection of ships for modification of accommodation and ablutions; revision of ships' complements to match accommodation available for women; and rules of behaviour for ships' companies.⁸ In addition, internal communications and public relations campaigns were mounted. Tasks were divided between the team and staff at the MOD or Naval Headquarters.

The Navy's public relations missed its goal of explaining the new roles for women. Commandant Larken described the Navy as being 'hoist in [sic] our own petard' with press coverage.⁹ In order to present a positive image of the Service, photogenic young Wrens were chosen for the media day staged aboard a frigate. Papers printed 'a lot of sexy images' rather than concentrating on the Navy's preferred line of the new career opportunities it was offering to women.¹⁰

The predicted adverse reaction by sailors' wives was immediate.¹¹ Married men were incensed that they had not had the chance to broach the subject at home before the

'Female Aircrew in the RAF', Air Vice Marshal Austin to Director Air Staff Briefing and Co-ordination, 13 Mar 1989).

⁵ FOI MOD: Navy Board, Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, Second Sea Lord, Jan 1990.

⁶ FOI MOD: WRNS Study - NAVB(I) 11 Jan 90, Minute to Navy Board members, Secretary to First Sea Lord, 15 Jan 1990.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ FOI Fleet: WRNS Personnel Sea Service - Ship Accommodation, 29 Mar 1990 and Wilson, 11 Jan 2011, transcript pp.1-5.

⁹ Larken interviewed by author, 29 Mar 2010, transcript p.8.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Experience of wives' reactions from other countries was included in the West Report, p.24.

announcement.¹² Wives in Portsmouth and Plymouth organised demonstrations, protesting that marriages would be put at risk by Wrens serving alongside their husbands in ships.¹³ One woman wrote to Archie Hamilton saying that it would be 'like dangling carrots before donkeys'.¹⁴ While the national press soon lost interest, local papers in areas with major naval bases persisted with articles about wives' objections.¹⁵

The *Navy News* gave the issues extensive coverage. In successive months, the paper published pages of letters for and against women at sea from serving men and women, retired personnel and wives of sailors.¹⁶ Its postbag was described as being dominated by the subject. Letters were variously described as 'critical, welcoming, acidic, witty - and unprintable'.¹⁷ No indication was given of the weight of opinion, though a majority of printed letters emphasised problems concerning men and women living together in ships rather than whether women should take on combat roles.¹⁸

A number of ideas took hold within the Navy. Early feedback to the Implementation Team showed that more credence was given to the need to overcome manpower deficits than to providing equal career opportunities to women.¹⁹ Captain England sent a briefing to commanding officers for dissemination to subordinates in which he encouraged the belief that opening warships to women was a political decision. He wrote that, rather than distinguishing between combat and non-combat ships, 'Ministers recommended that the Navy Board should consider WRNS personnel serving in all suitable surface ships'.²⁰ He explained that it was not a trial, though many thought it should be. He also countered the rumour that women would be

¹² FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service Feedback, 19 Apr 1990.

¹³ *Navy News*, Mar 1990, reported 20-30 women participating in protests in both Plymouth and Portsmouth. The Portsmouth local paper reported fewer than 40 marchers (*The News*, 16 Feb 1990).

¹⁴ Aldred, transcript p.5.

¹⁵ *The News* (Portsmouth), 6 Feb 1990, 7 Feb 1990, 12 Feb 1990 and 16 Feb 1990; *Western Morning News* (Plymouth), 6 Feb 1990, 7 Feb 1990, 10 Feb 1990, 17 Feb 1990.

¹⁶ *Navy News*, Mar 1990, Apr 1990 and May 1990.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, Apr 1990.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Mar 1990, Apr 1990 and May 1990.

¹⁹ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service Feedback, 19 Apr 1990. This report drew on issues raised with the implementation team.

²⁰ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service Feedback, 19 Apr 1990.

withdrawn from ships in the event of hostilities.²¹ One idea mooted as a means of avoiding mixed-crew ships was to give women their own ships. Alan West had dismissed this idea in his report in 1989. This was not the way other countries had handled seagoing for women, nor would it have been practical. A ship's complement needed experienced personnel and where were such women to be found unless they had been to sea already?²² Nevertheless, women-only ships retained some currency even after the decision to have mixed crews was announced.²³

Female Sailors

Admiral Sir Julian Oswald set targets of between 300 and 400 women at sea by the end of 1990, with the first contingent aboard ship by 1 October 1990.²⁴ This was an ambitious timescale, giving staff just eight months to implement a policy which Board members had spent nearly ten months considering. As new recruits would not be ready for sea jobs until 1991, volunteers were needed from among serving Wrens if initial targets were to be met. The first call went out two days after the announcement.²⁵ Initially, the objective was to choose women whose training for their trade most closely matched men's. They only needed additional training to enable them to work in ships. These courses included safety at sea, fire fighting and nuclear, chemical and biological warfare defence. Priority was given to radio operators, radar operators, photographers, stores accountants, cooks, physical training specialists, writers (i.e. clerks), regulators (disciplinary staff), aircraft mechanics, meteorological observers and stewards.²⁶

Although there were concerns about the rate of volunteering by serving Wrens, Admiral Oswald's target for the number of initial volunteers was achieved by June 1990.²⁷ His aspiration that these all be at sea by the end of 1990 proved unrealistic.

²¹ Ibid.

²² West Report, p.26.

²³ Two letters (one from a naval wife, the other from a retired petty officer) to *Navy News*, Mar 1990; Lieutenant Commander Elaine Smith, interviewed by author, 10 Aug 2010, transcript p.12. Smith recalled this idea was the subject of wardroom discussion at Fleet Headquarters, Northwood.

²⁴ FOI MOD: WRNS Study - NAVB(I) 11 Jan 90, Minute to Navy Board Members, Secretary to First Sea Lord, 15 Jan 1990.

²⁵ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service - Volunteers for Sea Service, signal 7 Feb 1990.

²⁶ Ibid and WRNS Sea Service Feedback, 19 Apr 1990.

²⁷ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/002 Part A , Pay for the Women's Royal Naval Service, Head of Naval Manpower and Training to Mr Bush, 11 Jun 1990.

It proved impossible to schedule training and ship modifications so quickly. Nevertheless, sixteen ratings and three officers joined the frigate HMS *Brilliant* by 8 October 1990. By the end of the year, a further 71 had joined the aircraft carrier HMS *Invincible* and 11 were serving in the training ship HMS *Juno*.²⁸ The Board paper of January 1990 identified a critical shortage of 70 radio operators, amounting to 24% of the vacant posts at sea.²⁹ By 11 January 1991, when women joined HMS *Battleaxe*, 32 female radio operators had been drafted to sea, nearly halving this problem within a year of the policy announcement.³⁰ By the end of 1991 planned ship modifications allowed for 567 berths, rising to over 1,300 in 1994.³¹

In a signal on 28 March 1990, Commandant Larken reported that the response to the call for volunteers had fallen well short of expectations 'based upon the earlier soundings'.³² She did not quote an anticipated figure, though subsequently an evaluation report stated that 1,500 Wrens had been expected to volunteer.³³ Larken blamed the slow response on adverse reporting and 'some lack of welcome from men'.³⁴ She urged commanding officers to 'personally do [their] utmost to counter gloomy and unhelpful counsel, and put the positive and forward looking view'.³⁵ In May 1990 Mr Bush, a Treasury official, also claimed that the rate of volunteering was poor. He had previously been critical of the policy, suggesting that it would affect female retention and recruitment adversely.³⁶

Commandant Larken and authors of the evaluation report may have been referring to a survey conducted during the West Study in 1988-1989. Of the returned questionnaires, about 50% of female officers and ratings had answered the question

²⁸ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service - Situation Report, 13 Dec 1990. One Wren and thirty members of the QARNNS were serving in Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Argus*, a casualty receiving ship for the Gulf War of early 1991. Two nurses served in HMS *Invincible*. See Appendix 6 for ratings' branches in the first mixed-crew ships.

²⁹ FOI MOD: Navy Board, Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, Second Sea Lord, Jan 1990.

³⁰ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service - Situation Report, 13 Dec 1990. Figures for female officers or total ships' complements were not included.

³¹ Ibid. See Appendix 7 for a list of ships to be modified.

³² FOI Fleet: WRNS Personnel - Service at Sea, signal 28 Mar 1990.

³³ FOI MOD: Integration of Sea Service: a Report to the Royal Navy on the Integration of the WRNS into the RN, Lyn Bryant, Joan Chandler and Tracey Bunyard, University of Plymouth, Oct 1995.

³⁴ FOI Fleet: WRNS Personnel - Service at Sea, signal 28 Mar 1990.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/002 Part A, Women's Royal Naval Service, Mr Bush to Mr Bonner MOD, 4 May 1990. A note on the letter recorded that none of the twenty-four Wrens serving in Hong Kong had volunteered.

'would you wish to serve at sea?' in the affirmative.³⁷ This figure may have seemed reasonable as the response of women who had joined the WRNS in support of the RN. However, 63% replied 'yes' to the question 'would you wish to fly?'.³⁸ It seems extremely improbable that a majority of Wrens aspired to be aircrew. Indeed, when the RAF announced that women would be accepted as pilots and navigators in July 1989, only two members of the WRNS applied to transfer.³⁹ The response to the 'flying' question should have raised doubt about the simplicity of the questionnaire. It seems more probable that respondents were indicating support for principles rather than personal intentions to volunteer. Reaction to a theoretical possibility may have differed from response to actual opportunity. In addition, opposition following the announcement of seagoing may also explain lower than anticipated volunteering.

Although there was some gloom about the response of serving Wrens, the impact on female recruitment was positive. Intakes increased both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the total intake. More roles were opened to women, with the WRNS recruiting its first engine room mechanics, sonar operators and seamen (sic).⁴⁰ However, in parallel with the work to widen the employment of Wrens, plans were made to cut the size of the Navy in response to the end of the Cold War. By 1993, 530 officers and over 1,000 non-commissioned personnel were to leave on redundancy terms.⁴¹ To minimise redundancy, recruitment to all the armed forces was severely curtailed from 1992. Although the Navy cut targets, women continued to form a greater percentage of annual intakes than before the sea service announcement (Table 7.1). Women as a percentage of strength of naval services also rose from previous norms (Table 7.2).

³⁷ West Report, Annex M. 'Yes' to seagoing: 26/55 officers and 147/298 ratings.

³⁸ West Report, Annex M. 'Yes' to flying: 36/55 officers and 188/298 ratings.

³⁹ AHB: WAAF/WRAF Miscellaneous Papers, News Release, 10 Aug 1989.

⁴⁰ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service - Situation Report, 13 Dec 1990.

⁴¹ *Navy News*, Jul 1992, p.1.

Table 7.1 Intake into Naval Services from Civilian Life 1985/86 - 1994/95

	Number									
	1985/86	86/87	87/88	88/89	89/90	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95
Men	5080	6024	5592	5535	5759	5712	5570	1888	1272	961
Women	289	545	580	700	860	1199	1013	384	250	340
Total	5369	6569	6172	6235	6619	6911	6583	2272	1522	1301
Women as % of total	5.4	8.3	9.4	11.2	13.0	17.3	15.4	16.9	16.4	26.1

Annual Abstract of Statistics, (London: HMSO) Vol.132 (1996), Table 7.4. 'Men' includes Royal Navy and Royal Marines. 'Women' includes nurses in the QARNNS as separate statistics were not published.

Table 7.2 Strength of the Naval Services 1986-95

	Thousands									
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Men	64.4	63.2	62.2	61.2	59.6	57.9	57.5	54.9	51.5	47.0
Women	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.6	4.2	4.6	4.5	4.3	3.9
Total	67.8	66.6	65.5	64.7	63.2	62.1	62.1	59.4	55.8	50.9
Women as % of Total Intake	5.0	5.1	5.0	5.4	5.7	6.7	7.4	7.6	7.7	7.7

Annual Abstract of Statistics, (London: HMSO) Vol.132 (1996), Table 7.3.

'Men' includes Royal Navy and Royal Marines. Figures for 'women' include nurses in the QARNNS and so overstate the percentage of WRNS compared with tables in earlier chapters.

The most intractable issue was the shortage of seagoing officers and senior ratings, with only approximately 8.5% of the latter volunteering.⁴² Senior women aboard ship were regarded as important for two reasons: young female ratings would have someone to turn to if they needed advice and senior women would be available to assist male supervisors or managers who might encounter difficulties in integrating Wrens into their departments.⁴³ However, based on Dutch experience, Alan West predicted in his report that women who lacked sea experience early in their careers would be unable to step into supervisory posts at sea.⁴⁴

Lieutenant Commander Elaine Smith made the attempt to switch to seagoing duties. Having worked in radar and intelligence, and not being qualified for other branches,

⁴² FOI MOD: Integration of Sea Service: a Report to the Royal Navy on the Integration of the WRNS into the RN, Lyn Bryant, Joan Chandler and Tracey Bunyard, University of Plymouth, Oct 1995.

⁴³ FOI Fleet: Integration of Sea Service - Continuation Study: Ship-board Survey, Lyn Bryant, Tracey Bunyard, Joan Chandler and Commander J L Wakeling, University of Plymouth, Oct 1995, p.7 and Commodore John Hart, interviewed by author, 7 Jun 2011, transcript p.10.

⁴⁴ West Report, p.26.

she became a seaman officer.⁴⁵ This is the executive branch of the Royal Navy, providing the route to the command of ships. She was assigned to HMS *Fearless* for three months as an officer under training, a status normally associated with the junior officer ranks of midshipman or sub-lieutenant.⁴⁶ She worked in the various departments in the ship for about a week each to learn about their organisation and roles. However, her experience proved to her that she was not employable at sea as a lieutenant commander. She drew on the example of her period shadowing the work of officers on the bridge. She held the same rank as the senior navigation officer, but although accustomed to working with charts, she had no experience of taking fixes to establish the position of a ship or of the calculations necessary to navigate a ship safely. The junior navigation officer assigned to instruct her had difficulty in coping with an officer senior to himself in rank, but deficient in skills and knowledge associated with her 'seaman' officer status. Although the senior officers aboard *Fearless* encouraged her, Smith decided that there was too much to absorb and too many training courses that she would need to do. She believed that, without sea experience accumulated as a more junior officer, she lacked the necessary expertise to take charge of a department in a ship. She curtailed her career, opting for redundancy.⁴⁷

First Gulf War - 1991

The concept of women in combat was almost immediately tested when HMS *Brilliant* deployed to the Gulf War in January 1991. Its commanding officer in 1990, Captain (later Rear Admiral) Richard Cobbold, volunteered to take the first Wrens to sea. He thought it would be an interesting challenge for his final months in command.⁴⁸ The ship was programmed for duty in UK waters but the crisis in the Gulf led to a change of orders. Cobbold reflected that 'as it turned out, it was a very good thing - it stopped people messing about, and they had to get on with it.'⁴⁹ Admiral Bathurst, Commander-in-Chief Fleet, said that he was asked by Julian Oswald whether he would send instead a male-only ship. The question was said to have originated from Ministers. Bathurst thought that to take *Brilliant* out of the plan

⁴⁵ Smith, transcript p.10.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp.14-15.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp.15-21.

⁴⁸ Richard Cobbold was replaced by Captain Toby Elliott in December 1990.

⁴⁹ Cobbold, transcript p.3.

because women were on board would undermine the policy. He argued that 'it [was] a very good opportunity for [Ministers] to find out the consequence of their decision'.⁵⁰ It is interesting to note that he ascribed the policy to politicians rather than to the Navy Board.

The media took no interest in women at sea during a war in which air and land operations dominated. However, *Brilliant's* crew made news when sex was the story. After hostilities had ended and while the ship was still in the Gulf, a married male officer and a single female officer were found naked together in his cabin. This was in contravention of strict rules about socialising aboard ship.⁵¹ The officers were sent for court martial and, as *The Times* recorded it, were found guilty of being naked together 'without reasonable excuse'.⁵² Each was fined £750.⁵³ *The Sun* provided the headline 'Nude romp', describing the woman as a 'randy Wren' while the man was more flatteringly called a 'dashing lieutenant'.⁵⁴ The second story concerned a female rating who became pregnant. Unlike the officers found in a cabin aboard ship, the ratings had not contravened rules because they conducted their relationship while on shore leave. The female rating co-operated with the *Daily Mirror*, which reported her story sympathetically. Apparently she concealed her pregnancy while aboard ship because she did not want to be sent home. The doctor thought she was putting on weight due to overeating and the stress of war.⁵⁵

Policy Evaluation

The Navy Board commissioned an evaluation of implementation of seagoing from the social science department of Plymouth University. Research, based on questionnaire surveys and interviews in mixed ships and men-only ships between 1993 and 1995, revealed problems created by haste in sending women to sea.⁵⁶ The reports exposed harsh realities of life aboard ship for women trying to break into

⁵⁰ IWM Sound Archive: Admiral Sir Ben Bathurst, accession number 27084, reel 11.

⁵¹ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service - Situation Report, Annex E, Fleet Temporary Memorandum (Aug 1990), 13 Dec 1990.

⁵² *The Times*, 14 Jun 1991.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *The Sun*, 14 Jun 1991, p.1 and p.5.

⁵⁵ *Daily Mirror*, 30 Sep 91, pp.16-17.

⁵⁶ FOI Fleet: Integration of Sea Service - Continuation Study: Ship-board Survey, Lyn Bryant, Tracey Bunyard, Joan Chandler and Commander J L Wakeling, University of Plymouth, Oct 1995; FOI MOD: Integration of Sea Service: a Report to the Royal Navy on the Integration of the WRNS into the RN, Lyn Bryant, Joan Chandler and Tracey Bunyard, University of Plymouth, October 1995.

previously male domains. Volunteers had had limited training and were not confident in fulfilling general duties aboard ship, particularly emergency roles. Uniforms appropriate to seagoing were not finalised until 1994. Protective clothing and equipment was not initially available in female sizes. Ratings complained of unfairness in how supervisors allocated tasks. Men thought they were given the heavy or dangerous work; women felt they were used too much for cleaning jobs. In some ships, the best accommodation for ratings had been given up to women. This led to rumours that women received preferential treatment. Men thought themselves vulnerable to unjustified complaints while women worried about making an accusation in case they were subsequently bullied. Male managers had no training in dealing with harassment complaints.⁵⁷ Despite the catalogue of problems, the reports from Plymouth University noted that the Navy was doing more to aid implementation of equality policies than most employers.⁵⁸ The findings were discussed by the Navy Board and the Second Sea Lord sent the executive summary to commanders to take action.⁵⁹

Fleet Headquarters staff, who visited ships as a matter of routine, also observed progress with implementation. In addition, Commandant Anne Spencer (Anthea Larken's successor) visited ships and passed information on to Headquarters staff. It was a commonly held view that the spirit aboard ship could be assessed within minutes of the start of a visit.⁶⁰ Where a ship's company was not integrating, responsibility was placed on the ship's senior officers. It was seen as a failure of leadership and commanding officers were to be held to account.⁶¹ Training on equality issues was introduced for officers and NCOs in an effort to improve management and leadership.⁶²

⁵⁷ FOI Fleet: Integration of Sea Service - Continuation Study: Ship-board Survey, Lyn Bryant, Tracey Bunyard, Joan Chandler and Commander J L Wakeling, University of Plymouth, Oct 1995.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.3.

⁵⁹ FOI Fleet: Integration of Sea Service - Continuation Study of Seagoing Personnel, 4 Dec 1995.

⁶⁰ Commandant Anne Spencer, interviewed by author, 12 Jan 2011, transcript pp.12-13; Hart, transcript p.7; Clare, transcript p.15 and p.21.

⁶¹ FOI Fleet: Integration of Sea Service - Continuation Study of Seagoing Personnel, 4 Dec 1995; Spencer, transcript p.24.

⁶² Hart, transcript p.11 and p.13.

Belief that women at sea were an experiment, that it was not working and could be reversed, was fuelled by the Navy's response to post-Cold War defence cuts.⁶³ With reductions in recruitment, there were insufficient new women to replace those coming to the end of their first assignment at sea. In 1994 women were consolidated in fewer ships. Between six and eight ships reverted to male manning.⁶⁴

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which the Navy wished it had not made its decision just as post-Cold War planning was starting. A lone officer, writing for the *Naval Review*, suggested the policy should be abandoned.⁶⁵ He thought it was being judged successful because opinion was being suppressed. He called for a 'frank and honest debate'.⁶⁶ Admiral Bathurst, Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet in 1990, subsequently said 'we would rather at the time – we would rather we hadn't had to go down this route. But we couldn't man the Navy with men only.'⁶⁷

Implementation of Flying Policies

While Director WRNS was significantly involved in planning the introduction of seagoing and subsequent merger of her Service with the RN (see below), Air Commodore Ruth Montague's contribution to the implementation of RAF flying policy was limited.⁶⁸ She appealed for volunteers through the *RAF News*⁶⁹ and a member of her staff attended meetings which reviewed selection of potential aircrew.⁷⁰ However, she thought it best that work was carried out by specialists within existing committees and policy areas.⁷¹ Air Vice Marshal Bob Honey, responsible for career management for RAF personnel, confirmed that the Director WRAF did not take part in big policy decisions in the personnel department.⁷²

⁶³ 'Ricochet', 'Amazons at Sea', in *Naval Review*, Vol.82, No.3, 1994, p.221.

⁶⁴ FOI Fleet: Women at Sea, Minute to Minister Armed Forces' Office, 14 Feb 1994.

⁶⁵ 'Ricochet', 'Amazons at Sea', pp.221-3.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.223.

⁶⁷ IWM Sound Archive: Admiral Sir Ben Bathurst, reel 11.

⁶⁸ Ruth Montague was promoted first to group captain and then to air commodore to fill the Deputy Director and, subsequently, Director posts. She was the last officer to be promoted on this 'WRAF' basis.

⁶⁹ *RAF News*, 10 Jan 1992, pp 1 and 3.

⁷⁰ Air Commodore Ruth Montague, interviewed by author, 29 August 2007, transcript pp.4-5.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.11.

⁷² Air Vice Marshal Bob Honey, interviewed by author, 25 May 2011, transcript p.14.

Difficulties in Meeting Targets

The 1989 policy paper set a recruiting target of 25 female pilots and 10 female navigators each year, representing 10% of the planned intake. Allowing for failures in training, it was anticipated that there would be 100 female pilots and 45 navigators within five years.⁷³ Reality fell well short of the projection. In April 1994 there were about 10 female pilots and 10 navigators (see Table 7.5). Two main reasons are apparent. First, the 1989 policy paper set unrealistic targets through inadequate assessment of the impact of anthropometric data and failure to learn from experience in other countries. Second, implementation was affected by post-Cold War defence cuts.

Table 7.3 Male and Female Officer Aircrew in the RAF 1989-2007

	Number at April			
	Pilot		Navigator	
	M	F	M	F
1989	3290	-	1820	-
1990	3170	-	1820	-
1991	3080	<5	1820	<5
1992	3060	<5	1810	<5
1993	2980	<5	1770	10
1994	2880	10	1700	10
1995	2730	10	1600	20
1996	2580	20	1500	20
1997	2380	20	1390	20
1998	2310	20	1350	30
1999	2220	30	1300	30
2000	2180	30	1240	30
2001	2140	30	1180	30
2002	2090	40	1140	40
2003	2130	40	1100	50
2004	2130	50	1050	50
2005	2110	50	1010	50
2006	2070	50	960	50
2007	2010	50	900	60

FOI DASA: RAF and RN Aircrew Statistics 1989-2007, 27 Nov 2007. Statistics were rounded. Numbers below 5 were not recorded. These figures include trained aircrew whether employed on flying duties or not.

The 1989 policy paper for the Air Force Board made only brief reference to anthropometric limitations, saying that '[women] could be weeded out in the

⁷³ FOI MOD: AFBSC(89)11 Female Aircrew in the Royal Air Force, Jun 1989.

selection process' if they did not meet the criteria.⁷⁴ Without quoting statistics, it noted in an annex that the Canadian forces rejected a higher proportion of women than men on anthropometric grounds.⁷⁵ No estimate was given of the proportion of women who would be rejected for failing to meet the limits for RAF aircraft, even though Air Vice Marshal Mills, Director General of Medical Services, had commented for a draft version that perhaps 50% of women would fail anthropometric criteria.⁷⁶

Air Vice Marshal Mill's advice was supported in a paper in 1990 from the Institute of Aviation Medicine. It compared data on sitting height, buttock to knee length and reach for women in the United States Air Force with the RAF's minimum entry limits for aircrew. It found that 60% of women would be excluded on sitting height, 30% on buttock to knee length and 50% on reach.⁷⁷ Assessed against particular aircraft types, the author estimated that 55% of women would not meet the requirements for the Jet Provost training aircraft and 60% would not meet those for the Hawk aircraft used to train fast jet pilots.⁷⁸

Ejection seat parameters were another critical factor. Some women were too light, so there was increased risk of serious injury if they had to eject. It was thought that some countries added weights to women's personal survival packs to enable them to fly aircraft fitted with ejection seats.⁷⁹ The RAF apparently accepted some women who met the anthropometric criteria but were too light, even for the parameters of the Tucano training aircraft's ejection seat.⁸⁰ Flight Lieutenant Dawn Hadlow, the first woman to qualify as a flying instructor, thought that none of the women would have dared to withdraw on the basis of increased risk of injury through being too

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Female Aircrew in the RAF', Air Vice Marshal Mills to Air Secretary, 30 Mar 1989.

⁷⁷ G. M. Turner, RAF Institute of Aviation Medicine, 'The Application of USAF Female Anthropometric Data to Identify Problems with the Introduction of Female Aircrew into the RAF', Advisory Group for Aerospace Research and Development [henceforward AGARD] Conference Proceedings No. 491, April 1990, p.17.1.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.17.2.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.17.2.

⁸⁰ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Employment of Female Aircrew', Deputy Controller Aircraft to Air Member for Personnel, 2 Dec 1991.

light. She recalled flying with flight reference books in her pockets to increase her weight.⁸¹

Annexes to the 1989 policy paper recorded numbers of female aircrew in Canada and the USA. Canada opened some aircrew roles from 1978, with unrestricted employment from 1986. By 1989 there were eighteen female pilots from a total of 2,053 and eight navigators out of 783. In the previous two years, nine women had been recruited to these roles compared with 410 men, just over 2%. The paper quoted the Canadian Forces as saying that 'very few women [had] shown an interest'.⁸² The United States Air Force set targets for women as a proportion of the available squadron jobs. Forty places per annum were available to female pilots on squadrons, compared with 1,700 for men. Thus its target for female recruits was between 2% and 3% of its male intake.⁸³

Such analysis as there was of potential recruits for the RAF concentrated on women in University Air Squadrons.⁸⁴ In 1989 there were 74 female members. A survey of these women showed that 30 had applied to civil airlines. Some expressed interest in joining the RAF to fly instead.⁸⁵ However, the paper failed to note that these women would not necessarily pass the RAF's anthropometric requirements. Not being eligible for RAF flying careers when they joined UASs, they had been admitted on the less demanding criteria of the Bulldog aircraft rather than more stringent standards of the RAF's operational and training aircraft.⁸⁶ No assessment was made of the other major source of recruits, the Air Training Corps.⁸⁷ The Air Force Board paper failed to include a plan for achieving a target of 10% for female recruits. It did not explain how the RAF was to do so much better than Canada and the USA in attracting women who met the criteria.

⁸¹ Flight Lieutenant Dawn Hadlow, interviewed by author, 14 Mar 2012, transcript p.9.

⁸² FOI MOD: AFBSC(89)11 Female Aircrew in the Royal Air Force, Jun 1989.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ In the late 1970s about one-third of the pilot intake came from this source (TNA: DEFE 10/1206, PPO 38/77 University Service Units, 8 Jun 1977).

⁸⁵ FOI MOD: AFBSC(89)11 Female Aircrew in the Royal Air Force, Jun 1989.

⁸⁶ G. M. Turner, 'The Application of USAF Female Anthropometric Data to Identify Problems with the Introduction of Female Aircrew into the RAF', AGARD Conference Proceedings No.491, Apr 1990, pp.17.1-2. The author estimated that only 20% of women would not meet the anthropometric guidelines for the Bulldog.

⁸⁷ This youth organisation supplied about 45% of the officer aircrew intake in the late 1970s (TNA: AIR 29/4666 RAF Inspectorate of Recruiting Annual Reports 1976-79).

Achievement of targets was also affected by defence cuts which followed the ending of the Cold War. The RAF's 50 operational squadrons of 1989 were reduced to 42 by 1995.⁸⁸ Over this period, there was a cut of over 16% in pilot numbers and nearly 11% in navigators (Table 7.3). With experienced pilots to be redeployed from disbanding squadrons, considerably fewer places were available for junior pilots emerging from training. New intakes were substantially reduced and trainees' progress through the sequence of courses was interrupted. Waiting times for courses could exceed a year and some trainees were diverted temporarily into ground-based jobs.⁸⁹ Dawn Hadlow, who was selected for ground attack Tornado aircraft training, recollected being told she would have to wait 18 months for her course because training had been affected by the diversion of resources to the Gulf War in 1991.⁹⁰ Helen Gardiner waited eighteen months for her operational conversion unit course for the fighter variant of Tornado aircraft (see Figure 7.1 for the pattern of flying training).⁹¹ With defence cuts slowing flying training for men and women alike, it took until financial year 2002/03 before the initial target figure of 45 navigators was surpassed (Table 7.5). By 2007 about 2½% of pilots were female. This was comparable to the level found in the UK's commercial airlines.⁹² It also mirrored the experience of American and Canadian armed forces.

Practical Problems

Implementation was hampered by practical problems and further failures to take note of experience from elsewhere. In April 1990, NATO's Advisory Group for Aerospace Research and Development (AGARD) held a conference on female aircrew. Papers given at the conference revealed problems with selection testing, anthropometric data, equipment and clothing sizes, the hazards of publicity and dealing with stresses in training.⁹³ RAF experience showed similar problems to those reported by American and Canadian officials.

⁸⁸ *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, Vol.132 (London: HMSO, 1996), Table 7.1.

⁸⁹ Personal knowledge of the author who worked at the RAF's Training Group Headquarters 1991-93.

⁹⁰ Hadlow, transcript p.14. Rather than wait for fast jet training, she became an instructor.

⁹¹ Squadron Leader Helen Gardiner interviewed by author, 21 Oct 2011, transcript pp.8-9.

⁹² Clare Walker, 'Aviation is Still a Man's World', in Keith Hayward (ed.), *British Aviation 1908-2008: Towards the Second Century of British Powered Flight*, (London: Royal Aeronautical Society, Apr 2008), pp.64-65.

⁹³ *Recruiting, Selection, Training and Military Operations of Female Aircrew*, AGARD, Conference Proceedings No.491, Apr 1990.

The RAF had already encountered problems with flying equipment and clothing with the introduction of female air loadmasters into the Hercules transport aircraft fleet in the 1980s. Coveralls were designed for men of minimum height 5' 6"; flying boots were a minimum size 6. Even with women of the requisite height, other dimensions did not match up to men's. Feet, hand and neck sizes all tended to be smaller in women than in men of the same height. In consequence, boots, gloves, helmets and aircrew respirators were too large for some women. Some could not achieve a neck seal with the respirator, which was necessary for safeguarding against the threat of chemical or biological agents.⁹⁴ There was already a system in place for ordering items for men who exceeded stocked sizes. The same method was to be used for women who were smaller. The Institute of Aviation Medicine cautioned that necessary sizes might not be available for years, as moulds and lasts did not exist.⁹⁵

If possible, women made do with the nearest men's size, with adjustments made by stations' safety equipment sections. Flight Lieutenant Julie Gibson recollected:

'My hands were a lot smaller. And I'm not necessarily a small woman. In flying training they tried to sew some gloves for me but it was never really satisfactory and the flying suit was always too big.'⁹⁶

Flight Lieutenant Keren Watkins remembered having her hands and feet drawn around so that gloves and boots could be made for her.⁹⁷ Flight Lieutenant Wendy Nichols, one of the first batch of trainee navigators in 1990, also remembered that nothing fitted. Only 5' 3", her flying suit was too big. With long sleeves getting in the way of plotting positions on maps, she 'took matters into [her] own hands and got the stuff better tailored'.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ G. M. Turner, 'Some Equipment Problems Associated with the Introduction of Female Aircrew into the Royal Air Force', AGARD Conference Proceedings No.491, Apr 1990, pp.20.1-20.2.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.20.2.

⁹⁶ Flight Lieutenant Julie Gibson, transcript p.28.

⁹⁷ Flight Lieutenant Keren Watkins, interviewed by author, 21 Oct 2011, transcript p.5.

⁹⁸ Flight Lieutenant Wendy Nichols, interviewed by author, 11 Feb 2012, transcript pp.5-6.

Fast jets provided a challenging twist to the usual dilemma of toilet facilities for women working in male environments. Men could urinate into a tube containing absorbent sponges. A different solution was needed for women. The USA's National Aeronautics and Space Administration introduced incontinence pads for crew use during the launch and entry to orbit phase of space shuttle missions in the early 1980s.⁹⁹ The Institute of Aviation Medicine worked on the same idea but was still trying out solutions in 1997. The incontinence pads being provided to women were not popular with Helen Gardiner and Keren Watkins, two of the early fast jet women. They said they wore them but tried to avoid using them.¹⁰⁰

Some Early Female Aircrew Experiences

As all RAF pilots and navigators were officers, there was substantial delay before recruits completed selection processes and officer training (an eighteen week course - see Figure 7.1). In order to make an early impact with the new policy, like the Navy, the RAF sought volunteers from within its ranks. There were forty-seven applicants within ten days of the announcement: five were civilians and the remainder were already in the Services.¹⁰¹ Eleven attended the Officer and Aircrew Selection Centre at Biggin Hill on 14 August 1989.¹⁰² Some women were accepted although they were too short to meet the anthropometric criteria.¹⁰³ This practice had been applied previously to male candidates who were judged to have excellent potential.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Bettyann Holtzman Kevles, *Almost Heaven*, (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 2006), p.75.

¹⁰⁰ Gardiner, transcript pp.15-16; Watkins, transcript p.13.

¹⁰¹ Squadron Leader M Redmore, 'Female Aircrew in the Royal Air Force', *Royal Air Force '90*, p.7.

¹⁰² AHB: WAAF/WRAF Miscellaneous Papers, Press Release, 10 Aug 89.

¹⁰³ G. M. Turner, 'The Application of USAF Female Anthropometric Data to Identify Problems with the Introduction of Female Aircrew into the RAF', AGARD Conference Proceedings No.491, Apr 1990, p.17.2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.17.2.

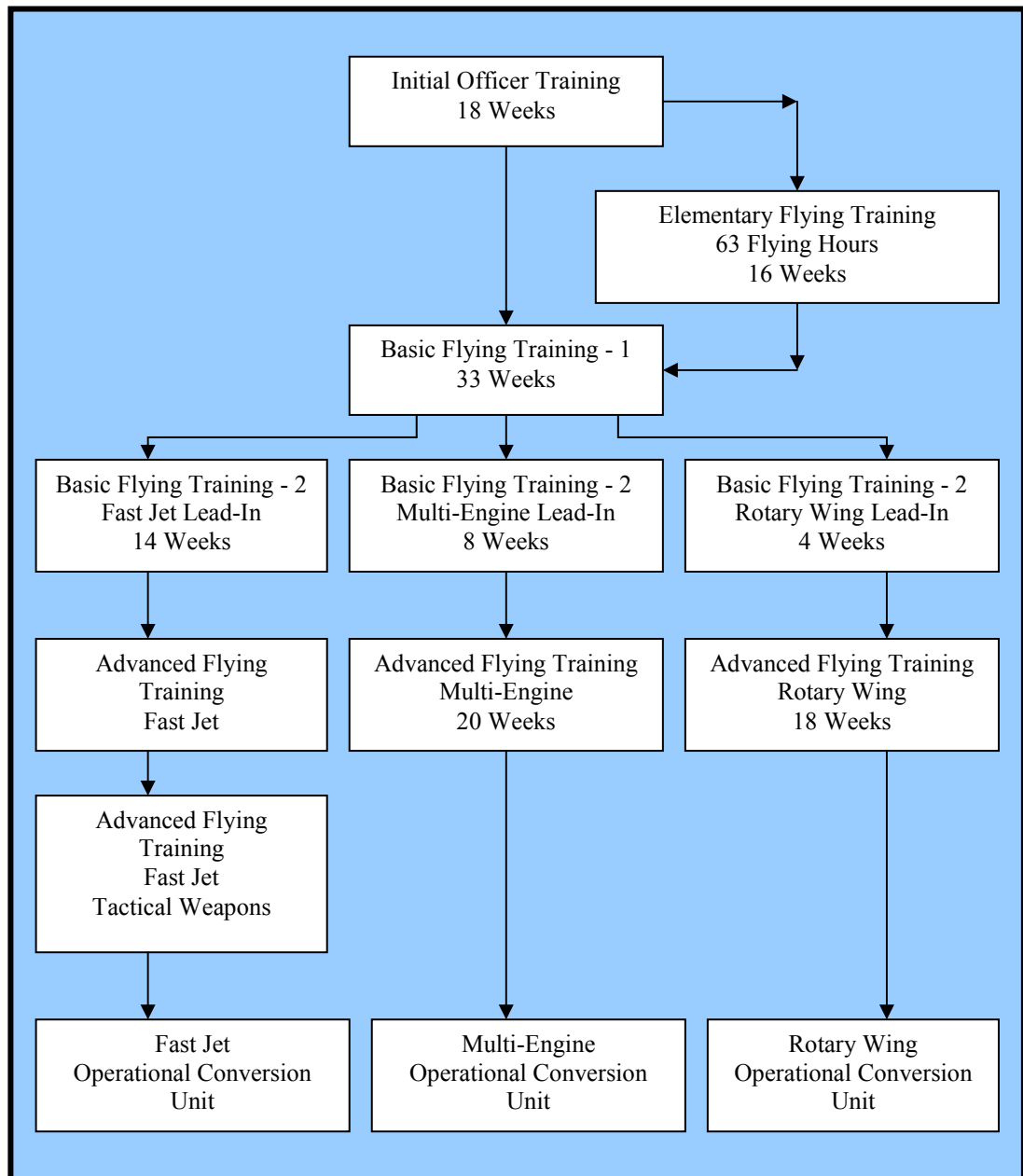


Figure 7.1 Pattern of Flying Training

FOI MOD: AFBSC(89)11 Female Aircrew in the Royal Air Force, Jun 1989.

Flight Lieutenant Julie Gibson, who had been seeking a flying career for years, was among the first accepted.¹⁰⁵ An engineering officer, in 1989 she was taking her private pilot's licence with a view to going into civil aviation when she left the Service. Attempting to fast track her because of her 30 hours of civil flying, she was exempted from Elementary Flying Training and sent directly to Basic Flying Training. Her male colleagues had at least the 63 hours of elementary training or

¹⁰⁵ Gibson, transcript p.11.

possibly more than 90 hours at a UAS.¹⁰⁶ Not surprisingly, she found her limited experience, spread as it was over a number of years, left her ill-prepared for the intensity of RAF training. She needed, and was given, extra hours of flying to come up to standard.¹⁰⁷ This was no small matter. Flying training syllabuses defined the number of hours (a proxy for cost) available to each student. There was a small margin of additional hours which were used at the discretion of training staff.¹⁰⁸ The allocation of extra hours was contentious. Men who were struggling could complain that women were treated more favourably. Overcoming initial difficulties, Julie Gibson was awarded 'wings' in June 1991. She flew Andover communications aircraft with 32 Squadron before moving to the Hercules transport fleet. Starting as a co-pilot in 1994, she was the first woman to become a captain on Hercules aircraft in 1998.¹⁰⁹

The RAF was eager to capitalise on the public relations value of admitting women to flying roles.¹¹⁰ In April 1990, Major Deanna Brasseur of the Royal Canadian Air Force warned a NATO conference on women as military pilots that publicity during training was harmful. She observed that Canadian trainee pilots were not counselled on how to handle the media and cautioned that women who dropped out of training could be reported as national failures.¹¹¹

As predicted by Brasseur, publicity proved to be a source of friction within the RAF as female pilots attempted to concentrate on qualifying while satisfying Public Relations demands for good media coverage. Julie Gibson described dealing with publicity as 'horrible'.¹¹² She explained the problem as more widespread than the training squadron. She said '[the publicity] created jealousy because people were jealous of the attention, jealous of the opportunity that was coming. It created

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pp.11-12. FOI MOD: AFBSC(89)11 Female Aircrew in the Royal Air Force, Jun 1989. FOI AHB: University Air Squadrons, AFBSC(85)1(X), Air Member for Personnel, 26 Feb 1985.

¹⁰⁷ Gibson, transcript p.15.

¹⁰⁸ Honey, transcript p.11.

¹⁰⁹ Flight Lieutenant Gibson Papers: valedictory letter on retiring from RAF from Air Vice Marshal Filbey, 1 May 2001.

¹¹⁰ IWM Sound Archive: Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Peter Harding, accession no. 28418, reel 40, recorded Sep 2005.

¹¹¹ Major Deanne Brasseur, 'A Canadian Female CF-18 Pilot's Experience', AGARD Conference Proceedings No.491, Apr 1990, p.2.2.

¹¹² Gibson, transcript p.15.

stress.¹¹³ According to Flight Lieutenant Keren Watkins, who qualified as a fast jet pilot in 1993, women could be seen as seeking the limelight and not serious about making a career in military flying. It damaged their professional standing with male colleagues.¹¹⁴ Flight Lieutenant Jo Salter, the first woman to qualify to fly fast jets, said she benefitted from the attention being focussed on Flight Lieutenant Sally Cox who had reached the tactical weapons phase of training before her.¹¹⁵ Salter avoided the glare of press interest until she became a combat pilot with 617 Squadron. She dealt with subsequent fan mail by enlisting the help of male colleagues to reply.¹¹⁶

Sally Cox failed the tactical weapons course and, as commonly happened to officers who dropped out of fast jet training, she reverted to flying multi-engine aircraft.¹¹⁷ Unlike Major Brasseur's description of Canadian experience, Cox's unsuccessful attempt to become a fast jet pilot was mostly handled sympathetically by the press. Reference was made to the difficulty of the training, the earlier failure of a male colleague on the same course and the fact that 20% of candidates usually did not make the grade.¹¹⁸ Exceptionally, the *London Evening Standard* used her failure as an opportunity to run an editorial piece questioning the morality of allowing women to serve in combat roles. The paper asked whether the country wanted 'our Sally Coxes dropping bombs?'¹¹⁹ It followed this up with a sexist cartoon that suggested women were temperamentally ill-suited to combat flying.¹²⁰ It subsequently published two letters on the subject, one from a man and one from a woman. Neither agreed with the editorial line. Rather, both correspondents argued that excluding women was discriminatory, that the expectation of willingness to fight should not be a burden borne only by men and that if women were willing and able, then combat roles should be open to them.¹²¹

Press coverage had a different tone from that which plagued the Navy. Reports were usually content to cover the facts of women's progress. The sexual scandal angle that

¹¹³ Ibid, p.15.

¹¹⁴ Watkins, transcript p.16.

¹¹⁵ Salter, transcript p.7.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.15.

¹¹⁷ *The Times*, 19 Jun 1993.

¹¹⁸ *Daily Mail*, 4 Mar 1992, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 Mar 1992, *Sunday Times*, 8 Mar 1992.

¹¹⁹ *Evening Standard*, 4 Mar 1992.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 5 Mar 1992

¹²¹ Ibid, 9 Mar 1992.

accompanied women in ships was absent. However, Helen Gardiner recalled the chaos that ensued when news broke that, while on 'Quick Reaction Alert' duty, she had been sent to intercept two Russian aircraft approaching UK airspace. A television channel wanted to make it a news story. It attempted to telephone her for an interview while she was still on duty. Such was the interest from the media that calls to her Squadron had to be vetted before being connected.¹²²

Senior RAF figures became concerned about the adverse impact of publicity. Air Marshal Sir John Thomson, Commander-in-Chief Support Command, thought it would be important to stop focussing publicity on female aircrew and 'allow these people to integrate and compete with their fellows without this additional pressure.'¹²³ His view was shared by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon, who became Chief of the Air Staff in 1992. He told the *RAF News* that previous publicity was understandable, but it put women under too much strain.¹²⁴

Initial volunteers for pilot training suffered higher failure rates than the planned figure. This prompted Air Marshal Thomson to complain about the quality of candidates. Training being part of his Command, he commented that women were withdrawing because 'of impending marriage ... [or] not enjoying flying'.¹²⁵ However, he thought that better candidates were coming through the system.¹²⁶

Thomson's better candidates included women who had benefitted from membership of UASs or the Air Training Corps. Helen Gardiner had 100 hours in her logbook and Keren Watkins 140 hours before embarking on Basic Flying Training.¹²⁷ This was a substantially better platform than Julie Gibson's level of experience at the start of training. Both were successful. Gardiner was the first air defence pilot, flying Tornado F3 fighter aircraft. Watkins, initially selected to be an instructor, went on to

¹²² Gardiner, transcript, p.16. Quick Reaction Alert entailed crews of fighter aircraft being ready to take off within fifteen minutes to intercept unidentified aircraft. Crews were on duty for 24 hours.

¹²³ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Employment of Female Aircrew', Air Marshal Sir John Thomson to Air Marshal Sir Roger Palin, 2 Dec 1991.

¹²⁴ *RAF News*, 11 Dec 92.

¹²⁵ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Employment of Female Aircrew', Air Marshal Sir John Thomson to Air Marshal Sir Roger Palin, 2 Dec 1991.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Gardiner, transcript p.2; Watkins, transcript p.3.

be the first woman to fly the single seat Jaguar aircraft.¹²⁸ Kath Bennett, the third woman on their basic course and a former member of the Air Training Corps, succeeded in qualifying as a helicopter pilot.¹²⁹

The 1989 policy proposal had observed that women could usefully add to the numbers and quality of the pool of navigators and so it proved.¹³⁰ With navigator training being shorter than that for pilots, these were the first to graduate from basic flying training (March 1991) and subsequently to reach operational squadrons.¹³¹ As with pilots, initially they were to be employed only on non-combat aircraft. However, early successful candidates showed up a limitation of this policy. Air Marshal Sir Roger Palin, Air Member for Personnel, observed that some women were outperforming men at the Air Navigation School, but they could only be assigned to air transport or air-to-air refuelling aircraft. This meant that 'an undue proportion of their less capable male colleagues [were being] posted to Nimrod, where they [would] either fail training or the present standard [would] have to be reduced.'¹³² Decisions to extend women's employment to all types of aircraft prevented this problem from persisting.

Terms of Service

Pay

By the late 1980s there were two key inequalities between men and women's terms of service. First, women were paid less than men, in part because women received a lower rate of military pay supplement, known as X-factor (see Chapter 4). In March 1989, equal X-factor was proposed by Brigadier Crawford in his report on the future of the Women's Royal Army Corps. Recommending the employment of women in units in close support to infantry and armoured troops, he argued that women would be exposed to more danger than hitherto, would work longer hours and experience greater turbulence through operational deployments. He supported the full rate of X-factor for all members of the WRAC, rather than attempting to distinguish between

¹²⁸ *RAF News*, 20 Aug 93.

¹²⁹ Gardiner, transcript p.4.

¹³⁰ FOI MOD: AFBSC(89)11 Female Aircrew in the Royal Air Force, Jun 1989.

¹³¹ *RAF News*, 22 Mar 1991, p.2. Anne-Marie Dawe was the first to complete training. She joined a Hercules (transport aircraft) squadron.

¹³² FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Employment of Female Aircrew', Air Member for Personnel to Air Force Board Colleagues, 3 Jul 1991. Nimrod had reconnaissance and maritime patrol roles.

the demands of actual roles undertaken by women. He argued his case on the basis that there was 'no differentiation in the 'X' factor paid to males who [were] exposed to danger and hard physical work and those who [were] not'.¹³³

Paying X-factor on the basis of role and posting, rather than according to gender, had been considered and dismissed by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body a year earlier. It accepted the MOD's case that such judgements between jobs would be too subjective and administratively difficult.¹³⁴ However, it concluded that the gap between men and women's obligations had narrowed. In recognition of women's liability for armed guard duty, increased participation in deployments and greater turbulence through shorter tour lengths and more overseas postings, the difference was reduced from 2.5 to 1 percentage point in 1988. This differential was justified on the basis that women were 'not generally liable to combat duties'.¹³⁵

As the X-factor differential was linked to combat duties, it was not affected by the RAF's 1989 decision to open pilot and navigator jobs to women. Women were to fly those aircraft described as non-combat. However, seagoing brought women the same liability for naval combat duties as men. Mrs Samuel, a Treasury official, had already noted the potential administrative difficulties of seagoing Wrens receiving the full X-factor while other servicewomen remained on the lower rate.¹³⁶ In 1990, the Navy Department wanted to recommend equal X-factor for Wrens. As this had implications for the army and the RAF and it would take time to negotiate, it was held over for the next pay review. Full X-factor for all servicewomen was agreed in 1991.¹³⁷

There was a further aspect to pay for Wrens. From 1975 when the Equal Pay Act (1970) came into force, airwomen received the same basic pay as men on the basis of the skill level required for their trade. In the Navy, male ratings received extra pay for seagoing. This was not based on their trade but was paid in recognition that

¹³³ FOI MOD: Report on Study into Long Term Role and Employment of Women in the Army, 1 Mar 1989, p.3-6 and p.3-9.

¹³⁴ *Armed Forces Pay Review Body Seventeenth Report*, Cm.357 (London: HMSO, 1988), pp.5-6.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, pp.13-4.

¹³⁶ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/002 Part A, Employment of WRNS Personnel in the RN, Mrs Samuel to Mr Batt, 29 Jan 1990.

¹³⁷ *Armed Forces Pay Review Body Twentieth Report*, Cm.1414 (London: HMSO, 1991).

they undertook extensive communal duties aboard ship as well as their own specialised work. These 'all of one company' rates, as they were known, were paid as long as the man remained available for sea duty.¹³⁸ The extension of seagoing pay to women was agreed as a matter of 'natural justice' and following legal advice that under both domestic and European law a pay differential could not be justified.¹³⁹ Debate centred on the date from which the increment should be paid. Proposals considered were the date of joining a ship or the date of volunteering. As there could be a substantial delay between volunteering and actually joining a ship, a compromise was agreed: the date of completion of the sea safety course.¹⁴⁰ Treasury agreement was sought in February 1990, an approach made to the Chairman of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body in March and the Prime Minister approved his recommendation in April.¹⁴¹ The pay rise for junior rates going to sea was estimated at not more than £1,000 per annum (1990 value).¹⁴² It was exceptional for action on pay to be taken outside the normal Pay Review Body timetable. However, in this instance, it was deemed essential to agree new terms of service to encourage women to volunteer for seagoing.¹⁴³

Entitlement to Resign

The second key inequality favoured women who married while in the armed forces. These women had the right to leave on or after marriage at shorter notice than men or single women. In the 1980s, male ratings, airmen and single women could apply to leave at eighteen months notice.¹⁴⁴ On marriage, Wrens could give nine months

¹³⁸ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/002 Part A, Pay for the Women's Royal Naval Service, PPO 7/90, under cover of letter, 16 Feb 1990.

¹³⁹ Ibid, Pay for Seagoers in the Women's Royal Naval Service, MOD paper for members of the Pay Sub Committee, 1 Feb 1990.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/002 Part A, Pay for the Women's Royal Naval Service, Head of Personnel and Logistics MOD to Mr Bush, 16 Feb 1990; Pay of WRNS Ratings, Chairman Armed Forces Pay Review Body to Prime Minister, 26 Mar 1990; Prime Minister to Sir Peter Cazalet, 25 Apr 1990.

¹⁴² Ibid, Head of Naval Manpower and Training to Mr Batt, 31 Jan 1990. This was a substantial pay rise. The pay of able seamen in 1989 was in the order of £9200; a male lieutenant earned £12,700 (*Armed Forces Pay Review Body Nineteenth Report*, Cm.936 (London: HMSO, 1990). Reports listed pay rates for male army personnel. Other rates were derived by formula from that starting point.

¹⁴³ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/002 Part A, Pay for the Women's Royal Naval Service, PPO 7/90, under cover of letter dated 16 Feb 1990.

¹⁴⁴ FOI Fleet: Open Engagement, Admiralty Board Paper, 11 Aug 1982; FOI AHB: ID3/A/18/1 Part 3 Terms and Conditions of Service, Nine Year Notice Engagement, 15 Jun 1989.

notice¹⁴⁵ while airwomen could leave at six months notice.¹⁴⁶ Needing to protect the investment in training, in 1989 the RAF made volunteers for pilot and navigator roles surrender the right to leave on marriage until they had amortized costs. This was set at six years after completion of the final stage of training - an Operational Conversion Unit course (Figure 7.1).¹⁴⁷ This conformed to the period set for male aircrew who wanted to apply for premature release. Treasury officials asked why the policy change should not apply throughout the women's Services.¹⁴⁸ However, flying policy was intended to affect only a few women. For the vast majority who worked in ground based roles, the Air Force Board reaffirmed that the right to leave on marriage was 'seen as fundamental to women's terms of service'.¹⁴⁹ The Air Force eventually changed its rules in 1994, shortly after reference to the 'WRAF' ceased (see below).¹⁵⁰ The situation for the Navy was different. From September 1990, all WRNS recruits had to go to sea and so were given longer and more expensive training. To protect that investment, they lost the right to leave on marriage.¹⁵¹

Pregnancy

A further issue concerning women's terms of service was addressed at this time: policy on pregnancy. There were two components: dismissal and maternity benefits. Servicewomen were normally discharged in the sixteenth week of pregnancy, though practice varied. For example, Wrens could work in civilian maternity clothes beyond that point.¹⁵² The Services allowed women to apply to rejoin after childbirth, provided that they undertook to fulfil their military commitments and made adequate child care arrangements. However, there was no right of return. Applications could

¹⁴⁵ Naval Historical Branch Admiralty Library: Defence Council Instructions (Navy) 417/84, Change in the Notice Period for Female Ratings on Marriage, 16 Nov 1984.

¹⁴⁶ FOI AHB: ID3/A/18/1 Part 3, Nine Year Notice Engagement, 15 Jun 1989.

¹⁴⁷ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/001 Part A, Female Aircrew, AUS(P)Air to Mr Fox, 29 Jun 1989.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, Female Aircrew in the RAF, Mr Fox to AUS(P)(Air), 7 Jul 1989.

¹⁴⁹ FOI AHB: ID3/A/18/1 Part 3, Nine Year Notice Engagement, 15 Jun 1989.

¹⁵⁰ *RAF News*, 29 Jul 94, p.4.

¹⁵¹ *Armed Forces Pay Review Body Twentieth Report*, Cm.1414 (London: HMSO, 1991).

¹⁵² Larken, interviewed by author, 29 Mar 2010, transcript p.10.

be rejected.¹⁵³ This provision to re-apply was not well known and seems to have been rarely invoked.¹⁵⁴

Maternity benefits were contentious in the late 1980s because the armed forces were exempt from the Social Security Act (1986) which introduced statutory maternity pay (SMP).¹⁵⁵ SMP was paid for eighteen weeks, of which six weeks could be paid at 90% of weekly earnings. To qualify for this rate, women had to have worked for the employer for at least two years and remain in work until fifteen weeks before the baby was due. If they did not qualify for this high rate, they were entitled to a fixed basic rate (£32.85 in 1987/88).¹⁵⁶ SMP was subject to tax and national insurance.¹⁵⁷ Servicewomen received tax free, maternity allowance. It was worth £30.05 per week in 1987/88 and was also payable for eighteen weeks.¹⁵⁸

A review of policy in the RAF's personnel department concluded in February 1988 that there was no need to introduce SMP. Usually, servicewomen left before qualifying for the higher rate and the basic rate was deemed as good as the maternity allowance.¹⁵⁹ However, for those servicewomen who were allowed to continue beyond the sixteenth week of pregnancy, the difference between maternity allowance and SMP was significant. A calculation for women leaving the armed forces on pregnancy in 1988 suggested average pay was £9,000 per annum.¹⁶⁰ On that basis, the higher rate of SMP would have been £155 per week. This estimate was thought to be biased towards higher ranks than those women who actually left

¹⁵³ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/001 Part A, Female Aircrew, AUS(P)Air to Mr Fox, 29 Jun 1989.

¹⁵⁴ FOI MOD: Report on Study into Long Term Role and Employment of Women in the Army, Mar 1989, p.3-5. West Report, Mar 1989, p. 23 and p.34. FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/001 Part A, Female Aircrew, AUS(P)Air to Mr Fox, 29 Jun 1989.

¹⁵⁵ FOI AHB: ID3/A/18/1 Part 3, Maternity Leave and Exit on Pregnancy, Air Member for Personnel to Board Colleagues, 3 Feb 1988.

¹⁵⁶ Susan McRae, *Maternity Rights in Britain: the PSI Report on the Experience of Women and Employers* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1991), p.86.

¹⁵⁷ FOI AHB: ID3/A/18/1 Part 3, Maternity Leave and Exit on Pregnancy, Air Member for Personnel to Board Colleagues, 3 Feb 1988.

¹⁵⁸ McRae, *Maternity Rights in Britain*, p.86.

¹⁵⁹ FOI AHB: ID3/A/18/1 Part 3, Maternity Leave and Exit on Pregnancy, Air Member for Personnel to Board Colleagues, 3 Feb 1988.

¹⁶⁰ FOI Department of Work and Pensions [henceforward DWP]: 1989/90 Bill: Extension of SMP to Servicewomen, Jun 1989.

on pregnancy.¹⁶¹ However, even the lowest ranking servicewoman would have been entitled to £97 per week if they qualified for higher rate SMP.¹⁶²

The case for SMP for servicewomen was taken up with Ministers by Anne Armstrong, the families' correspondent of *Soldier* magazine.¹⁶³ Roger Freeman, Under Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, was already in discussion with the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) on the issue. It arose in negotiations on the rate of national insurance contributions to be paid by the armed forces.¹⁶⁴ Two key principles emerged. MOD officials wanted assurance that the rate of SMP payable would come under 'fair dismissal' clauses in the legislation. Their second concern was that SMP would imply introduction of maternity leave and the right to return to work.¹⁶⁵ This second issue was simple to resolve. SMP benefit and maternity leave came under two separate pieces of legislation. Granting SMP would not lead to maternity leave.¹⁶⁶ Uncertainty over the question of fair dismissal of pregnant women continued into mid 1989, at which point legal advice concurred that this regulation would apply. Pregnant women were deemed unable to fulfil their duties.¹⁶⁷ Once MOD's fears were allayed, an amendment was included in the review of the Social Security Act. SMP was introduced for women whose expected week of confinement was on or after 21 October 1990.¹⁶⁸

Rather than seagoing and flying policies driving change, the MOD continued to reject maternity leave. Junior women had questioned the lack of maternity leave for some years.¹⁶⁹ However, senior women tended to oppose its introduction. Group Captain Cynthia Fowler (Deputy Director WRAF 1989-91) feared that periods of absence could call into question the employment of women as costs would be

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Calculation based on pay quoted in *Armed Forces Pay Review Body Seventeenth Report*, Cm.357, (London: HMSO, April 1988).

¹⁶³ FOI DWP: Joint Parliamentary Under Secretary of State DHSS to Anne Armstrong, 18 January 1989. '*Soldier*' magazine was the army equivalent of *Navy News* and *RAF News*.

¹⁶⁴ Employers paid the benefit but set the cost off against their component of national insurance. FOI DWP: Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (DHSS) to MOD, 21 Apr 1988, (extract) and Social Security Bill 1989-90: Statutory Maternity Pay for Servicewomen, 28 Jul 1989.

¹⁶⁵ FOI DWP: Statutory Maternity Pay for Members of the Women's Services in the Armed Forces, 18 Nov 1988.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ FOI DWP: Statutory Maternity Pay for Members of the Women's Services, 27 Jun 1989.

¹⁶⁸ FOI DWP: Statutory Maternity Pay for Servicewomen, DSS to MOD, 31 May 1990.

¹⁶⁹ West Report, pp.22-3. FOI AHB: ID3/A/18/1 Part 3, Air Member for Personnel Liaison Team Report, 28 Jul 1987 and Maternity Leave and Exit on Pregnancy, 3 Feb 1988.

increased.¹⁷⁰ Commandant Larken was against mothers being employed in the Service, believing that the responsibilities of motherhood were incompatible with the demands of a military career.¹⁷¹ In addition, if maternity leave was available, it would also have to be granted to single women. This official sanction of behaviour, which went against the social code of conduct, was anathema.¹⁷² Mothers were not given the right to rejoin; they were only to be encouraged to apply to return.¹⁷³

The MOD's attempt to draw a line on revised terms of service for women at maternity leave failed following the intervention of the Equal Opportunities Commission. In 1990 it took up cases for two women dismissed on pregnancy.¹⁷⁴ Following judicial review, the MOD conceded the introduction of unpaid maternity leave. From October 1990 women were entitled to a maximum of 29 weeks leave.¹⁷⁵ In December 1991, following further legal processes, MOD announced that women could apply for 14 weeks paid maternity leave and 48 weeks total leave.¹⁷⁶

With the MOD acknowledging that it had been in contravention of EU and domestic law since August 1978, women who had been dismissed on pregnancy sought compensation for unfair treatment. Cases were brought by 5,038 women.¹⁷⁷ Initially many settled for the maximum payout available under industrial tribunal rules. The compensation limit of £11,000 was successfully challenged at the European Court of Justice and a few payouts, reaching hundreds of thousands of pounds, hit the headlines in the national and specialist press. There were few defenders of the sums, with both men and women arguing that 'they knew the rules, so they should not be claiming this money'.¹⁷⁸ Payouts were in marked contrast to the limited sums awarded to personnel (mostly men) injured in the First Gulf War. The *Sun* expressed

¹⁷⁰ Air Commodore Cynthia Fowler interviewed by author, 25 May 2007, transcript p.3.

¹⁷¹ Larken, interviewed by author, transcript p.10.

¹⁷² FOI AHB: ID3/A/18/1 Part 3, Maternity Leave and Exit on Pregnancy, 3 Feb 1988.

¹⁷³ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/001 Part A, Female Aircrew, AUS(P)Air to Mr Fox, 29 Jun 1989.

¹⁷⁴ Equal Opportunities Commission, *Annual Report 1991*, (London: HMSO, 1991), pp.18-19.

¹⁷⁵ FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/002 Part A, Defence Council Instructions - Royal Navy 261/90, Terms of service for pregnant women in the Naval Service, Oct 1990.

¹⁷⁶ *Navy News*, Feb 1992, p.15.

¹⁷⁷ FOI MOD: Chief Claims Officer, Annual Report 1997/1998, extract, Oct 1998.

¹⁷⁸ *The Times*, p.3, 25 Mar 1994 and p.2, 8 Apr 1994 reported awards of £172,000 and £150,000 to two former WRAF officers and £300,000 to a former major in the army. *The Independent*, p.17, 13 Jul 1994 suggested that there was outrage at compensation at a time of defence cuts; *RAF News*, letters, 26 Nov 93, 9 Sep 94 and 18 Nov 94.

the situation succinctly with the headline 'Barmy Army' concerning a £300,000 award to a former major. It went on (original emphasis):

'she knew the rules. SHE decided to marry; SHE got herself pregnant. YOU are paying the bill. But injured personnel get just a few grand.'¹⁷⁹

By 1999 all maternity claims were settled at a cost of £60.3 million.¹⁸⁰ These cases divided opinion in the Services and generated some ill feeling towards women at a time when morale was strained by post-Cold War reductions in defence spending. This was not simply a divide on the basis of gender. Childless women could be as vehemently opposed to these payouts as men.¹⁸¹

The Women's Services

Merging the WRNS into the Royal Navy

Rather than the haste which had accompanied seagoing policy, time was allowed to complete the necessary planning to integrate women into the Royal Navy. Most work was due for completion by April 1994.¹⁸² The earlier date of 1 November 1993 was selected for disbanding the WRNS to coincide with the last day in office of Anne Spencer, the retiring Commandant.¹⁸³

As an early symbol of women's new standing, officers' rank titles were changed to those of the Royal Navy on 1 December 1990.¹⁸⁴ As female officers' titles, such as first officer, chief officer and superintendent, had been something of a mystery to those not closely involved, the change was welcomed. Equivalent ranks of lieutenant commander, commander and captain needed no explanation of the person's authority in military circles. The term 'wren' was retained in rank titles for junior ratings.

¹⁷⁹ *The Sun*, 9 Apr 1994.

¹⁸⁰ FOI MOD: Chief Claims Officer, Annual Report 1998/1999, extract, Jul 1999.

¹⁸¹ Commander Maggie Robbins, interviewed by author, 27 Jul 2011, transcript pp.15-17. She attended some tribunals on behalf of the RN; *Daily Telegraph*, 9 Apr 94, pp.1-2; *Times*, p.15, 8 Sep 94.

¹⁸² FOI Fleet: WRNS Integration with the RN, 21 May 1991.

¹⁸³ Spencer, transcript pp.8-9.

¹⁸⁴ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service - Situation Report, 13 Dec 1990.

Commandant Spencer described this as the most emotive subject and she announced the outcome of deliberations with some satisfaction in *The Wren*.¹⁸⁵

Anne Spencer might equally have applied 'emotive' to the subject of braid used for rank insignia and badges. Blue braid had been symbolic of the WRNS since its first formation in 1917. For many, changing from blue to gold represented a real loss of identity and a signal that their Service was being gradually absorbed into the Royal Navy. Yet gold braid was also seen as a further necessary step 'to reinforce the esprit engendered by full integration' if women at sea were to be recognised as having the same authority of rank as men.¹⁸⁶ Due to a shortage of gold braid, this change was not implemented until 1 April 1992.¹⁸⁷

The sea service implementation team had a major task in planning career structures for seagoers, women who chose not to volunteer and those in roles with no jobs at sea. Possible career paths were mapped out for each individual officer. For ratings, the work was tackled at the level of the branch in which they were employed. Separate rosters for promotion were retained for non-seagoing women while those who did go to sea were merged over a period of time into the RN's system.¹⁸⁸ Early volunteers had the option to revert to shore-based service if they found it too hard to adjust to ship-board work. This privilege was not extended to later volunteers or new recruits. Thus the WRNS fragmented into recent recruits obliged to go to sea, volunteers for sea, volunteers who reverted to shore work only, non-volunteers in branches that could go to sea and women who worked in roles with no equivalent aboard ship. The latter, about 20% of non-commissioned Wrens, were identified by Anne Spencer as casualties of the policy change (see Table 7.6).¹⁸⁹ Over a period of years, many of these roles were disestablished.

Anne Spencer identified a second group of casualties: those women too senior to go to sea.¹⁹⁰ This was true to an extent. Some took the opportunity offered by the post-

¹⁸⁵ NMRN: 2007.15.6, *The Wren*, No. 316, Feb 1993, p.9. The Wrens' Association had about 9,000 members (retired and serving, all ranks) at this time.

¹⁸⁶ FOI Fleet: WRNS Integration with the RN, 21 May 1991.

¹⁸⁷ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service - Situation Report, 13 Dec 1990.

¹⁸⁸ Wilson, interviewed by author, 11 Jan 2011, transcript p.6 and p.8.

¹⁸⁹ NMRN: 2007.15.9, *The Wren*, No. 319, Feb 1994, p.20.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Cold War redundancy programmes to leave. However, there are striking examples of success among those who stayed despite not going to sea. Annette Picton and Carolyn Stait, who were lieutenant commanders in 1990, subsequently achieved promotions to commander, captain and finally to commodore.¹⁹¹ They were the first women in regular naval service to reach this rank. After their retirement, there was a demographic hiatus while those who served in ships gained sufficient experience to compete for high rank. Excluding medical services, by 2011 the most senior women officers held the rank of commander (13 out of a total of 890 commanders) and, in branches open to women, 32 of 525 warrant officers were female.¹⁹²

Table 7.4 Women in Non-Seagoing Branches

Branch	Women at Feb 1990			Outcome for the Role
	Leading Hand and Below	Petty Officer	Chief Petty Officer and Warrant Officer	
Dental Hygienist	19	7	1	Retained
Dental Surgery Assistant	84	11	3	Retained
Education and Training Support	106	29	8	*Phased out by April 2000 - announced 1993.
Family Services	-	12	17	(Not traced)
Driver	11	2	1	Declared obsolete 1985**
Quarters Assistant	13	15	10	(Not traced)
Telephonist	56	4	3	***Declared obsolete August 1992. Remaining jobs to be filled by civilians.
Weapon Analyst	106	23	5	****Phased out by April 2000 - announced 1993.
Writer (P)			1	(Not traced)
Total	395	103	49	

FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/002 Part A, Pay for Seagoers in the Women's Royal Naval Service, Annex A, 1 Feb 1990.

* *Navy News*, Jun 1993, p.12; ** FOI Treasury: DM - DSPA/AT/0046/002 Part A, Pay for the Women's Royal Naval Service, Head of Naval Manpower and Training to Mr Bush, 11 Jun 1990; ****Navy News*, Aug 1992, p.15; *****Navy News*, Apr 1993, p.4.

¹⁹¹ Annette Picton was recorded as a commodore in *Navy List*, (London: HMSO, 2003) and Carolyn Stait was promoted to commodore in June 2004, *Navy List*, (London: HMSO, 2005).

¹⁹² Commander Liz Walmsley, 'From Integration to Inclusion - Realizing the Full Potential of Women for the Royal Navy', Royal United Services Institute, 30 Nov 2011.

The WRAF

Following the 1989 study into the employment of women in the army, the Women's Royal Army Corps disbanded in 1992 and women integrated into various support Corps.¹⁹³ With the WRNS disbanding in November 1993, that left only the WRAF with a distinctive designation. This was an anomaly as women had joined the RAF rather than a women's Corps or Service from 1949. The Air Force Board decided it needed to address the image of separateness.¹⁹⁴

Air Commodore Ruth Montague made a plea for the role of Director to continue, mainly based on representational duties. She suggested it could be reduced by a rank, to group captain.¹⁹⁵ Her case was not convincing. Rather, it was suggested that senior women officers would not wish to be promoted artificially into the role and preferred to make their careers within their specialisation. The case of Air Commodore Joan Hopkins, a fighter control officer, was cited as an example (see Chapter 4).¹⁹⁶ The date of a planned re-organisation of the RAF Command structure, 1 April 1994, was chosen as the moment when reference to 'WRAF' would cease.¹⁹⁷ This was convenient also for Ruth Montague's retirement date. For women in the Air Force the change made little difference.

Women's career prospects improved as it became possible to combine careers and family. In 1990, not including the Director post which was confined to women, one female group captain and eighteen wing commanders were serving in ground branches.¹⁹⁸ By 2011, there were five air commodores, twenty group captains and ninety wing commanders, the latter including some aircrew.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ FOI AHB: Further Integration of Women in the RAF, Air Force Board Standing Committee Paper (93)13(X), Air Member for Personnel, 19 Nov 1993.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ FOI AHB: Director Women's Royal Air Force, Air Commodore Montague to Air Member for Personnel, Jan 1992.

¹⁹⁶ FOI AHB: Further Integration of Women in the RAF, Air Force Board Standing Committee Paper (93)13(X), 19 Nov 1993.

¹⁹⁷ AHB: WAAF/WRAF Miscellaneous Papers, Further Integration of Women in the RAF, Brief for Minister Armed Forces, 28 Jan 94.

¹⁹⁸ *Air Force List*, (London: HMSO, 1990).

¹⁹⁹ Air Commodore Barbara Cooper, 'Women and Air Power', Royal United Services Institute, 30 Nov 2011.

Promotion depended not only on performance in a post but the status of that post. In the early 1990s the process of selection for appointments was opaque. Officers stated a preference for their next posting on annual report forms. Forthcoming vacancies were not advertised. The Air Secretary's staff decided on suitable candidates. For senior appointments, such as station commanders, candidates were discussed with the Commander-in-Chief of the appropriate Headquarters. Air Vice Marshal Honey, Air Secretary from 1989 to 1994, recounted:

'It must have been Support Command – for [an officer to command] Uxbridge. I looked at the group captains and I thought Cynthia Fowler was the person to do it on merit. I had met her earlier when she was a squadron leader. I was very impressed with how sharp she was ... When I went to the Commander-in-Chief ... he was not taken by the idea. ... And I also had to put that in front of Chief of the Air Staff ... They didn't want to do it. ... I said, well fine. Give her the chance. Put her in there. If she does a good job - great. If she doesn't, we'll get rid of her. ... On that basis, they eventually accepted it. But it was this block – you can't have a woman station commander. ... That took a lot of persuading, but it just showed you, even in those days - and that must have been 1990 or 1991, a resistance to putting women into positions of real responsibility.'²⁰⁰

At that time, station commanders were normally married men who served accompanied. Wives were expected to undertake social and welfare tasks. Appointing a single woman undermined this practice. In Cynthia Fowler's case, the key senior officer was prepared to put her name forward. She was successful as the first female commanding officer of a large RAF station and was subsequently promoted to air commodore. She was only the third woman since the creation of regular service in 1949 to reach that rank other than as Director WRAF.

²⁰⁰ Honey, transcript p.5. (Cynthia Fowler became station commander at Uxbridge in 1991. Fowler, transcript p.1).

Conclusion

Crucially for women's careers, the decision to open the surface fleet was approved by the Queen and the Prime Minister and announced by Archie Hamilton on the basis of equality not just as a solution to manpower shortages. Likewise, members of the Air Force Board supported, or at least recognised, the idea of equality of opportunity for women. It would have been difficult to reverse the new policies given that they had been linked to a newly adopted principle of equality.

Admiral Oswald forced the pace on implementation of seagoing by setting ambitious targets. However, his policy added to practical problems in training, equipment and clothing, and the development of working practices and social rules aboard ship. As Plymouth University's evaluation reports showed, men and women were still struggling to adapt to the policy five years after its introduction. Nevertheless, Admiral Oswald's initial objective of between 300 and 400 women at sea was met in 1991. Subsequent plans for expansion and ability to sustain the number of women at sea were affected by defence cuts.

The failure of RAF policy to meet targets for numbers of female pilots and navigators was in part due to defence cuts but also occurred because they were ill-founded in the light of experience in other countries and expert advice on the impact of anthropometric data was ignored. Initial staff work did not include a recruiting plan. Implementation also suffered from haste. In seeking to gain kudos in opening new roles to women, it waived entry standards for some early volunteers. More of these women withdrew from training than the planned wastage figure. Like the Navy, the RAF did not allow time to solve equipment and clothing issues. The slow-down in training as a consequence of defence cuts, on top of the unsubstantiated aspiration to recruit twenty-five female pilots and ten navigators per annum, resulted in only about twenty women reaching squadrons by April 1994. However, as suggested when the policy was adopted, women were proving to be competent navigators. Numbers qualifying as pilots were consistent with experience in other countries.

While women's job opportunities were expanded, the MOD's interpretation of 'equality' stopped short of meaning that women were to be treated in accordance with civilian employment norms. Policy-makers resisted the introduction of maternity leave, not least because of opposition from senior women officers who perceived the obligations of motherhood as incompatible with military duties. It took a combination of action by aggrieved former servicewomen, dismissed because of pregnancy, and the Equal Opportunities Commission, which took up their cause, to bring about change. Still, the Directorate of the WRAF clung to a distinction in terms of service through the right of women to resign on marriage. This disparity between men's and women's commitment to the RAF was only relinquished when reference to 'WRAF' was discontinued in 1994.

In November 1993 and April 1994, Anne Spencer and Ruth Montague (the last Directors of the WRNS and WRAF respectively) retired. Their departures also marked the end of the WRNS and reference to the WRAF. Air Commodore Ruth Montague was marginal to developments in women's employment opportunities, opposed changes in maternity and marriage regulations and sought to retain the post of Director. In contrast, senior WRNS officers contributed to the decision to disband their Service in the knowledge that they were helping to create a fundamentally new career for women in the Royal Navy. Although they realised that changes would end careers for those who could not or would not adapt, they believed they were safeguarding a future for women in the Navy.

Conclusion

This thesis has established why and how the integration of women into the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force was achieved over the period from the end of the Second World War to the mid-1990s. It has done so by exploring the purpose of employing women in these Services, understandings of combatant status and combat roles, the impact of terms and conditions of service on women's careers and the importance of organisational factors on the influence of senior women officers. By taking the history of these two Services together, it has exposed critical policy interactions. It has accounted for why the Royal Navy opened main combat roles to women before the RAF and why new boundary lines were drawn at land warfare and submarine service. It has identified the key steps in the erosion of the principle that women were not employed in combat, how the armed forces' divergence from societal norms and employment laws came to a crisis point in the late 1980s, and the apparent adoption of a new principle of equality in 1990.

Accounts of women in the armed forces have been dominated by analysis of wartime service and, latterly, by developments in widening their roles in the 1990s. Army issues have attracted more scholarship than histories of women in the other two Services. In particular, land warfare, with its potential for close contact with the enemy, demands for physical strength and aggression, and the assumed adverse impact of women's presence in small combat teams, has received more attention than the opening of main combat roles to women in the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.

Lucy Noakes' account of the establishment of the WRAC identified two key ideas. First, women were seen as lessening the need for men at a time when the continuation of national service indicated an unusually high requirement for personnel in the armed forces in peacetime. Second, she argued that women released men for higher value work. This thesis supports her analysis that regular service following the Second World War was not a foregone conclusion. However, as Chapter 1 showed, lessening the need for men was not central to the arguments in the Air Ministry or the Admiralty. Indeed, some senior male officers thought that the

employment of servicewomen implied the loss of the equivalent number of more useful men.

In 1945, guided by the views of Air Marshals Sutton and Evill, the Air Ministry was in favour of a reserve cadre for women rather than regular service. Opinion was swayed by Air Marshal Slessor's (Sutton's successor as Air Member for Personnel) belief that servicewomen would be needed in a future total war, that the RAF should be organised in peacetime with all the components it would need in war, and that regular service would avoid the difficulties encountered in re-establishing the WAAF in the early years of the Second World War. While Sir William Brown's objection that employing women would not give value for money was acknowledged, his argument was overturned by Slessor's case for the military imperative at the Air Force Board.

The existence of the WRNS owed more to army and RAF intentions to employ women, than to enthusiasm in the Admiralty to retain its women's Service. Constraining women to shore-based work meant there were two camps: those who thought women released men to serve in the fleet (higher value work) and those who believed that the Navy could manage without women who would block jobs needed to give men respite from seagoing. Like the Air Force Board, the Admiralty was unconvinced about obtaining value for money from the WRNS. Without pressure from the other Ministries, it is more likely that the Admiralty would have opted for a reserve of women rather than regular service in 1946.

Two important points emerge from arguments on regular service that continued to play a part throughout this history. First the Air Ministry was more committed to integrating women into the RAF than the Admiralty was in its employment of women. Second, in both Ministries, there was an unresolved debate about whether employing women represented value for money. The RAF was predominantly concerned by high turnover of women and the potential waste of training resources. Assessments of the WRNS tended to conclude that women were cheaper to employ than men. However, being a separate organisation, its overheads were more costly than the WRAF's.

The precarious foothold of the WRNS is evident throughout the period covered by this thesis. Its existence was persistently questioned, though sometimes this may have been simply routine consideration of measures that might save money, rather than a genuine intention to disband it. For example, its demise was suggested in the very month its regular status came into being and in the years leading up to the end of national service (Chapter 3). The role of the WRNS was studied in the 1970s, this time at the request of Commandant Mary Talbot, who sought to pre-empt any move in a defence review to question again the purpose of her Service (Chapter 5). All of this was familiar territory, then, to Commandant Anthea Larken when the National Audit Office attacked the lack of military duties in half of all Wrens' jobs in 1988 (Chapter 6). The WRAF was not subject to such pressures on its existence because airwomen were part of the RAF and worked on operational stations.

Despite questions as to its purpose and value, the WRNS survived. The Admiralty Board would have needed compelling reasons to make a political and public case to disband it. In 1949 the Admiralty Board thought it would be too embarrassing to dismantle an organisation that had only just been established. Perhaps the critical period was in 1957 when the announcement of the end of national service, signalling a significant cut in size of the armed forces, could potentially have been used as a moment for also dispensing with a uniformed corps of women. However, the other two Services announced their intention of retaining and, indeed, increasing their reliance on women as a hedge against insufficient male volunteers of the necessary quality. Although there seemed to be some reluctance in the Admiralty, the WRNS was retained. Like the others, it then sought to increase the strength of its women's Service. In November 1974, Tony Pritchard made a strong case for retaining the Wrens: women were well-qualified recruits available for jobs not requiring men; cheaper to employ than sailors; a workforce for isolated locations where civilian staff might not be available; and loyal at a time when doubt was cast on the reliability of unionised civilian staff. In 1988, when the National Audit Office perspective implied a need to make better use of the WRNS, there seemed to be an Admiralty Board presumption in favour of keeping the Wrens. Again, women were proving to be high quality recruits compared with the average sailor. At a time when the Royal Navy was struggling to retain men, dispensing with the WRNS would have compounded personnel shortages.

This thesis has not attempted to trace all the developments in women's employment. At the start of regular service in 1949, roles for the WRNS and the WRAF were a subset of those in which women had been employed in the war. In part, airwomen's employment was dictated by expected length of service. Unsurprisingly, they were excluded from long training such as apprenticeships. In addition, they were also not employed initially in some clerical trades with short training as this was needed for national servicemen, who served on even shorter terms of engagement. In the WRNS, roles included those that had no equivalent at sea (for example, drivers), those with a large percentage of shore-based rather than seagoing posts (for example, in the Fleet Air Arm) and those required for administration and training of women.

The central issue was women's relationship to combat. There were two aspects: combatant status and combat roles. The first was determined by gender. All servicemen, with the exception of chaplains and medical staff, were regarded as combatants. Women were not. Yet it was acknowledged within the defence Ministries that, in international law, women in the armed forces had combatant status. This status gave them safeguards under the Geneva Conventions. Nevertheless, it was the practice of the British armed forces to regard servicewomen as non-combatants.

Critically for regular servicewomen's career prospects, their employment was governed by this non-combatant designation and the exclusions from key roles and postings that derived from that principle. As Chapter 1 showed, in the late 1940 discussions, neither the Air Ministry nor the Admiralty appeared to give serious consideration to the War Office's idea of arming servicewomen, a proposal it also dropped. Seagoing was dismissed out of hand in the May 1946 Cabinet paper. This stance was not seen to require any justification. However, acknowledging women's role as pilots in the wartime Air Transport Auxiliary, the Air Ministry announced its intention to employ some female aircrew. This plan foundered on what became familiar grounds: cost, taking up of training places needed for men, and the limited roles that female pilots could undertake given that they were not employed in combat.

The definition of combat roles was problematic in the RAF with its divide between airborne and ground-based work. The extent of ground-based airmen's combat liability was questioned during women's pay negotiations in the late 1940s and in the 1950s (Chapters 2 and 3). Airmen were said to have a very limited liability to take up weapons. However, the existence of that liability, with its associated training, was sufficient to distinguish men as combatants and women as non-combatants, even when their main employment was otherwise identical.

As small arms training was the marker for combatant status for the great majority of men in the RAF, the decision to extend that liability to airwomen in the early 1980s was accorded insufficient attention in Christopher Dandeker and Mady Wechslar Segal's analysis of women's wider employment. As Chapter 4 showed, this decision removed the need to cap the number of women who could be employed and it opened important postings from which women had been excluded because they were previously not permitted to undertake tasks assigned to post-holders in war. In turn, access to these higher profile posts improved promotion prospects. This development was brought about by male officers on stations who needed more flexibility in assigning work to women and the encouragement of Air Commodore Joy Tamblin, acting in her advisory capacity. Small arms training was a key milestone that affected all airwomen, whereas opening of aircrew roles provided opportunities for comparatively few.

Introduction of weapons training, also implemented in the WRAC at the time (though not in the WRNS until 1989), was not described as making women's roles combatant. As was made apparent in Chapter 5, the MOD had good reason to avoid suggesting that that boundary had been crossed. Women's employment being restricted to what were described as non-combatant roles was the basis for exemption from the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). If that exemption was challenged, then women's exclusion from seagoing, flying and combat arms of the army could also have been questioned in the early 1980s.

Having abandoned plans to introduce female aircrew roles at the start of regular service, the RAF subsequently opened roles in response to various problems. The

first female aircrew were employed in duties akin to stewards aboard passenger aircraft on the basis of women being better suited than men to the role. They gained recognition as aircrew in 1962 when this status was given to the air quartermaster trade. Women's abilities as fighter control officers and aerospace operators, and the consequent high percentage of women employed in those fields, led to approval in 1984 of female rear crew for the airborne early warning aircraft. Fears about maintaining adequate elite male recruiting through the University Air Squadrons, under pressure from equality lobbies in universities, resulted in undergraduate women being trained as pilots from 1985. These women's proven aptitude for flying contributed to the decision to open pilot and navigator roles in the RAF in 1989 as the quality of male applicants declined. However, the RAF could and did stop short of fast jet roles, even though limiting women to 'non-combat' aircraft failed to solve the problem of insufficient men of the necessary standard for fast jet squadrons.

A variety of arguments were used to justify the categorisation of these new roles for women as non-combatant. Distinction was made between the purpose of weapons, types of aircraft or geographic factors. Thus, in the hands of women, small arms were used for defence, whereas men could undertake offensive action. Likewise, aircraft were divided into combat or non-combat categories, according to whether they were armed. Women could fly helicopters from 1989, but not in support of land warfare. They were approved to fly as rear crew in airborne early warning aircraft in 1984, but their role was to aid the air battle, not engage in the fight. Yet such distinctions drew criticism from some senior RAF officers who thought it lacked logic to describe as non-combatant women trained to use weapons in defence of their base or exposed to risk through operational flying.

Scholarship on women's roles in the armed forces in the 1980s and early 1990s has primarily focussed on the army. Joanna Bourke, Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter emphasised the importance of the diminishing supply of youths entering the labour market to decisions to expand women's employment. Christopher Dandeker and Mady Wechslar Segal's study into changes in each of the armed forces acknowledged this demographic trough as a driving force for change.

The importance of the demographic trough can be overstated. Chapter 6 showed that, although concerns about the supply of youngsters entering the labour market in the 1990s spurred studies in each of the Services into how to sustain their personnel requirements, this should not be taken as the reason for subsequent policy decisions to open more roles to women. The relative size of recruiting targets compared with numbers in relevant age cohorts, and the state of youth unemployment, suggests an adequate supply of young men in the population. The quality of potential recruits was a more critical issue.

For non-commissioned ranks in the RAF, the earlier decision to enable women to be armed allowed Air Marshal Jones (Air Member for Personnel) to pre-empt potential demographic trough problems by simply increasing the number of women who could be recruited. This required only a note to Air Force Board colleagues informing them of his decision rather than the protracted development of policy for the RN and in the army. Quality rather than numbers was the key concern for flying roles which continued to attract sufficient young men. However, in the late 1980s, the increasing failure rates in flying training caused alarm. Shortfalls in the numbers of pilots and navigators qualifying to join squadrons compounded the usual struggle to retain pilots in the face of competition from the civilian sector. A quota of women was seen as a means of replacing men with lower aptitude scores at the selection centre with better performing female candidates.

However, the Royal Navy was short of recruits, while the WRNS had a waiting list of women wanting to join. The Navy failed to adjust its recruitment policies to take account of the propensity of youngsters to remain in education for longer. Indeed, there was an inherent contradiction in that the Navy needed its recruits to be well qualified in order to absorb training to operate and maintain complex equipment, but it wanted men to join at a young age in order that they could undertake years of sea service before developing ties to life ashore. Those of the necessary technical aptitude preferred to remain in education, joining the labour market later.

Although there were recruitment problems centred on quality, personnel planning staff were more concerned with the persistent inability to retain sufficient highly trained and experienced men. Excessive outflow added to recruitment targets.

Dandeker and Segal made only limited mention of changing patterns of men and women's period of service. As Chapter 6 showed, retention of servicemen in the 1980s was affected by their aspirations for a settled family life. This came into conflict with demands of a military career that prized commitment to the Service, including the need to go where sent, at short notice, and accepting the risks entailed in operational service. As men's willingness to serve for long periods declined, so that of servicewomen increased. This, too, was a response to social developments: later marriage; an ability to control fertility; and deferring the age at which first pregnancy occurred. The narrowing gap between men and women's length of service altered the analysis of women's value for money in roles that required expensive training.

The Royal Navy's inability to follow the RAF's example and differentiate between combat and non-combat ships, and their deployment during operations, played a major part in its decision to open seagoing in warships. Even if such a definition could have been made convincing, it would still have failed to alleviate personnel problems as insufficient posts would have been created to solve shortages at sea or to provide enough opportunities for Wrens. It is clear that Admirals Oswald and Brown were reluctant to take the step of employing women in warships.

As in 1945-6, developments in 1989 and the early 1990s showed the crucial interactions between policies in the three Services. Admiral Oswald was under pressure from Archie Hamilton because the Minister saw the other Services' Chiefs proceeding with plans for wider employment of women. The principle of women's exclusion from combat had been used by the RAF and the army to set their proposed demarcation lines on women's roles in 1989. New opportunities were still described as non-combat roles. This exclusion was quoted as authoritative policy in papers on women's roles. It had been previously publicly endorsed by MOD ministers speaking in the House of Commons. However, during discussions on seagoing, Hamilton challenged the existence of a formal policy on the matter. The brief produced for him exposed the 'policy' as a 'precept' and so removed a key objection to women being employed in combat.

Archie Hamilton expected rational analysis of the personnel situation rather than prejudiced argument. He could not understand the idea of accepting men of lower standard, who would be more likely to fail training, when the WRNS was turning away more highly qualified volunteers. He also had the example of his visit to the Dutch Navy and examples from other allied nations of women serving at sea. Having questioned the origins of the non-combat principle, Hamilton removed the main obstacle that had been consistently used to set limits to servicewomen's roles. Unable to find an alternative solution to the Navy's personnel problems, Admiral Oswald conceded that women could serve in warships.

Eighteen months after the seagoing decision, the Navy Board approved flying roles for women in the Fleet Air Arm. Once the unmistakably combat roles of seagoing and naval flying were opened, the RAF's dividing line of 'combat' versus 'non-combat' aircraft was no longer sustainable. Most members of the Air Force Board recognised this reality, leaving only Air Chief Marshal Palin to articulate the case for exclusion from fast jets.

The new boundary line was drawn at submarine service and land warfare. There were many understandable reasons for exclusion from ocean-going submarines in the early 1990s. These presented a more physically and mentally testing environment than surface ships. The men and women of the Navy had much to learn about working together at sea before facing that challenge. However, there remained a deep-seated prejudice against women serving in this elite part of the Royal Navy. This thesis has also shown how the RAF and the Navy were content to allow army policy to dictate limits to women's employment in land warfare. In addition to doubts about women's physical strength and stamina, and their presumed adverse impact on cohesion and effectiveness of combat teams, the language used to describe combat focussed on more active words in describing men's roles in order to express the need for difference. Men were said to take part in 'direct combat' in which an enemy could be seen. In the infantry or armoured corps, men needed to be aggressive, belligerent and actively seek out the enemy. Coming in to 'close contact' with the enemy was perceived as unacceptable for women. Women's combat roles were 'indirect', with the enemy at a distance.

As Chapter 7 showed, implementation of seagoing and flying policies was affected by the post-Cold War defence budget cuts, redundancy programmes and reduction in recruiting targets. This serves to highlight the importance of the timing of the seagoing decision, made just a few weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Had Archie Hamilton accepted the limited seagoing in a few selected ships proposed by Admiral Oswald on the basis of Alan West's report, then it could be argued that warship service could have been deferred, at least for the period of reductions and reorganisation. If that had been the case, then the Air Force Board would not have come under pressure to open fast jet flying as early as 1991.

Anecdotal evidence suggests regret among some personnel that wider roles for women had been introduced. However, even if policy-makers had wanted to reverse the decisions, it would have been very difficult. In the Navy, women were already at sea. New recruits had joined as seafarers and with the expectation of careers on that basis. The Navy Board had put its weight behind the policy, explicitly promising that it was not an experiment, but that, in part, it was intended to promote equality of opportunity. In addition, it had been endorsed by the Queen and the Prime Minister. Whether or not there were regrets, policy of wider employment could not be easily abandoned.

Analysis in this thesis has shown that employment policies cannot be considered in isolation from developments in society. Initially, regulations on terms and conditions of service largely mirrored those found in civilian employment. Women were paid less than men, there was no formal marriage bar and they were obliged to leave on pregnancy. As conditions in the civilian labour market changed in the 1970s and 1980s with the passing of the Equal Pay Act (1970), Employment Protection Act (1975), the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Social Security Act (1986), so the Services' policies increasingly diverged from civilian practice.

Examination of pay policy illuminated important aspects of women's position in the armed forces relative to men. Chapter 2 showed how pay and pension negotiations delayed the introduction of regular terms of service. A crucial victory was achieved, in part by the efforts of Air Commandant Felicity Hanbury. It was Hanbury who enlisted the help of Caroline Haslett to overturn Sir Stafford Cripps' proposed

civilian pay scale for servicewomen. Equally of significance was the insistence of the defence Ministries that servicewomen should be paid in accordance with armed forces patterns because it was important for women to identify with the Services rather than as civilians.

It was common for employers at the time to pay women less than men on the assumption that they did not bear the burden of family costs. Unusually, Service pay scales already made this differentiation between married and single men through the mechanism of the marriage allowance. Thus it was a simple matter to define all servicewomen as single and relate their pay to the lower scale. In addition, because they did not share men's liability to use weapons, women were paid less than single men. When equal pay for non-industrial civil servants was introduced in the 1950s, the RAF wanted women to be paid the same as single men on the grounds that airwomen did the same work as airmen. As pay was negotiated on a tri-Service basis, and the case was not supported by the army or the Navy as they did not agree that their women undertook equal work, the Air Ministry set aside its proposal. By this time, evidence from the early 1950s showed that women did not stay to fulfil even their initial engagement because they could (and did) leave on marriage and had to leave on becoming pregnant. This lesser obligation to fulfil their military service was added to their non-combatant status to justify a pay differential, even when pay on the basis of marital status stopped in 1970. It was the seagoing decision that brought about equal pay for servicewomen, though the introduction of small arms training narrowed the differential significantly.

Women's tendency to serve for only a short time was a perennial problem that policy-makers failed to solve or, indeed, tackle. As Chapter 3 showed, this pattern of short service undermined targets to build up the number of women on introduction of regular service and following the end of national service. In neither Service did the number of women justify placing weight on lessening the need for men as a factor for retention of female components. Once the wartime generation had left, the percentage of women in the WRNS and the WRAF was mostly in the range of 3 - 4.5%, rising in the WRAF to over 5% in the 1980s. These figures fell well short of wartime peaks of 15.7% for the WAAF and 8.5% for the WRNS. However, short service was not always perceived as a disadvantage. RAF trades with a high

proportion of women, who were likely to leave after a few years, were seen as giving longer serving men enhanced promotion prospects. In addition, in the 1960s, short service began to be seen by Air Force Department finance staff as an advantageous way of managing reduction in the size of the RAF without incurring redundancy or immediate pension costs. However, more commonly, short service was at the heart of questioning investment in training, equipping and accommodating women.

While obstacles to married service were eased through attempts to collocate couples (or at least achieve some degree of proximity) and, from 1979 in response to the Sex Discrimination Act, allocation of married quarters to women, policy on pregnancy failed to keep pace with changes in legislation and attitudes in society towards mothers taking paid employment. The Directors of the women's Services consistently opposed retention of pregnant women. A mother's duty to her family was seen as superseding that to her career. Military obligations of unlimited hours of duty and geographic mobility were regarded as incompatible with family responsibilities. In addition, as with the birth control pill, introduction of maternity leave would also require concessions to single motherhood. Unmarried mothers were viewed as transgressing the moral code and liable to bring the women's Services into disrepute. This fear for reputation was not unfounded. As Chapter 7 illustrated, sexual behaviour of servicewomen was more likely to attract press attention than the work they undertook. Although from the late 1970s and 1980s, senior female officers knew of American experience of improved length of service if maternity leave was granted, the idea was not pursued. With the female leadership opposed to change, male policy-makers were no more inclined to take up the issue.

By the late 1980s, as in society, servicewomen were more likely to remain single or marry at a later age than in earlier post-war cohorts. Likewise, child-bearing could be planned and thereby deferred in favour of career aspirations. As a consequence, servicewomen in the 1980s served for longer than their predecessors. In addition, they were increasingly aware of their disadvantage in employment rights compared with civilians. However, the only concession to women, who raised questions on maternity policy in the 1980s, was the award of statutory maternity pay in place of maternity allowance. Extension of women's employment into flying roles and

seagoing, with consequent increased cost of women's training, did not bring about a change in maternity policy. This was where the line was drawn for the apparently new principle of equality of opportunity. It did not stand for long. The MOD introduced paid maternity leave when legal action was taken on the basis of European Union law by dismissed women, supported by the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Studying developments in the WRAF and the WRNS together has allowed the importance of organisation and status to emerge. These gendered titles covered very different situations. Having decided to retain women, and learning from employing women alongside men during the war, the Air Force Board chose to make women members of the RAF. Women came under the Air Force Act and were given powers associated with rank in the same way as men. This philosophy of integration of women into the RAF marginalised the Director of the WRAF from the outset of regular service. The high point of the post-holder's influence was embodied in its transitional leader, Air Commandant Felicity Hanbury. Air Commodore Joy Tamblin made an important contribution in the introduction of small arms training. However, on the development of flying roles for women, little was heard from successive Directors of the WRAF. Indeed, when the early women aircrew would have benefitted from a senior female officer speaking up on equipment and clothing issues, or in affording them some protection from unwelcome publicity, Air Commodore Ruth Montague was sidelined.

As women were not interchangeable with sailors, the WRNS was retained as a separate entity. The Admiralty Board's ambivalence about the idea of military women was shown by its rejection of legal advice to bring Wrens under the Naval Discipline Act. Thus, women were not accorded powers of rank enjoyed by women in the other Services. Importantly, their civilian status was seen also as a manifestation of lesser commitment and status within the naval Services and in comparison with the WRAF and WRAC.

However, Directors of the WRNS were in a stronger position than those of the WRAF even though the scope of the job declined over the decades. As Chapter 5 illustrated, sometimes this authority was used to argue for the Wrens' distinctive

identity, particularly exemption from the Naval Discipline Act, blue braid on uniforms rather than gold, and unique rank titles. Nevertheless, being Head of Service placed these officers on a footing with RN officers of higher rank. They had routine meetings with the First and Second Sea Lords, and at the time of the seagoing decision, access also to Archie Hamilton. Commandant Anthea Larken and her staff were an integral part of the deliberations on the West Study. In supporting the move to seagoing and consequent transfer of women into the Royal Navy, they were aware that the policy signalled the end of the Service that they had known. Whatever personal misgivings may have been held, the need to create a new naval career for women was accepted. Anne Spencer, who succeeded Anthea Larken, then also played her part in implementation of policy. These senior female officers were actively engaged in this far reaching policy in contrast to Air Commodore Montague's lack of engagement with female aircrew issues.

This thesis has explored personnel policies and established how the employment of women in the armed forces exposed and then narrowed the gap between military policies and social norms. However, it points to the need for a wider piece of research into the armed forces' right to be different from society, encompassing issues of ethnicity and sexuality as well as gender. Such research would shed light on the Ministry of Defence's position in respect of UK and European Union legislation. In addition, there is scope for a further study of the Women's Royal Army Corps in this period in order to understand how careers within a separate corps developed while women were employed in support of different elements of the army. The army's opening of the Royal Artillery and Army Air Corps to women, while maintaining exclusion from the infantry and armoured corps, provides interesting research questions that merit historical study.

This thesis has brought the history of women in the Navy and the Air Force in the second half of the twentieth century out of the shadow cast by army issues. Seagoing policy brought an end to the WRNS as women were integrated into the Royal Navy in November 1993. This was viewed with great sadness by many Wrens, but was seen as necessary to preserve women's roles as part of Britain's naval services. A few months later, airwomen scarcely noticed when the acronym 'WRAF' was dropped in favour of 'RAF'. However, for Flight Lieutenant Jo Salter, 'W' appearing

after her name on the honours board as winner of the British Aerospace trophy for the best overall student on advanced flying training at RAF Valley, remained a source of pride.¹

¹ Flight Lieutenant Jo Salter, transcript, p.17.

Appendix 1: Rank Titles

Commissioned Officers

Royal Navy	Women's Royal Naval Service	Royal Air Force	Women's Auxiliary Air Force (1939-1949)	Women's Royal Air Force (1949) ¹	Army and WRAC ^{**}	Auxiliary Territorial Service
Admiral of the Fleet		Marshal of the Royal Air Force			Field Marshal	
Admiral		Air Chief Marshal			General	
Vice Admiral		Air Marshal			Lieutenant General	
Rear Admiral		Air Vice Marshal	Air Chief Commandant		Major General	Chief Controller
Commodore ²	Commandant	Air Commodore	Air Commandant	Air Commandant*	Brigadier	Senior Controller
Captain	Superintendent	Group Captain	Group Officer	Group Officer*	Colonel	Controller
Commander	Chief Officer	Wing Commander	Wing Officer	Wing Officer*	Lieutenant Colonel	Chief Commander
Lieutenant Commander	First Officer	Squadron Leader	Squadron Officer	Squadron Officer*	Major	Senior Commander
Lieutenant	Second Officer	Flight Lieutenant	Flight Officer	Flight Officer*	Captain	Junior Commander
Sub Lieutenant	Third Officer	Flying Officer	Section Officer	Flying Officer	Lieutenant	Subaltern
		Pilot Officer	Assistant Section Officer	Pilot Officer	Second Lieutenant	Second Subaltern

* In 1968 WRAF officers were given the same rank titles as RAF officers.

** The highest rank achieved to date in the Women's Royal Army Corps is brigadier.

¹ Women joined the RAF from 1 February 1949 but for administrative purposes were designated as 'WRAF'. Reference to 'WRAF' ceased in 1994.

² Unlike the RAF's rank of 'air commodore', 'commodore' was not a substantive rank in the Royal Navy. It was a temporary rank associated with particular appointments.

Non-commissioned Ranks

Royal Navy	Women's Royal Naval Service	Royal Air Force (1949) ³	Women's Auxiliary Air Force	Women's Royal Air Force (1949)	Army	Auxiliary Territorial Service
Warrant Officer		Warrant Officer	Warrant Officer	Warrant Officer	Warrant Officer Class I Warrant Officer Class II	Warrant Officer Class I Warrant Officer Class II
Chief Petty Officer	Chief Petty Officer	Flight Sergeant	Flight Sergeant	Flight Sergeant	Staff Sergeant	Staff Sergeant
Petty Officer	Petty Officer	Sergeant	Sergeant	Sergeant	Sergeant	Sergeant
Leading Seaman	Leading Wren	Corporal	Corporal	Corporal	Corporal	Corporal
Able Seaman	Wren, Able rate	Leading Aircraftman	Leading Aircraftwoman	Leading Aircraftwoman	Private including lance corporal	Private including lance corporal ⁴
Ordinary Seaman	Wren (Trained)	Aircraftman, 1 st Class	Aircraftwoman 1 st Class	Aircraftwoman 1 st Class		
	Wren, Ordinary	Aircraftman, 2 nd Class	Aircraftwoman 2 nd Class	Aircraftwoman 2 nd Class		

³ Non-commissioned aircrew ranks have been omitted. Technician ranks were introduced later. Aircraftman 1st and 2nd class were later renamed as leading aircraftman and aircraftman. The former leading aircraftman rank became senior aircraftman. Ditto for women's rank titles.

⁴ TNA: AIR 2/10271, Air Ministry Order A75, 20 Jan 1949. Lance corporals ranked with privates but were senior to that rank.

Appendix 2: Notes on Interviewees

Recorded Interviews Conducted by the Author

Margaret Aldred	joined the Ministry of Defence in 1975. Between Spring 1988 and early 1990, she was private secretary to Archie Hamilton, Minister of State for the Armed Forces.
Admiral Sir Brian Brown	was a supply and secretarial officer who also served as a pilot with the Fleet Air Arm. He became the Second Sea Lord (Head of Naval Personnel) in 1989.
Rear Admiral Roy Clare	was a seaman officer who joined the RN as a junior rating. He was military assistant to the Minister for the Armed Forces (1988-1990) and went on to command HMS <i>York</i> as commander of the 3rd Destroyer Squadron. In 1996, he was appointed in command of HMS <i>Invincible</i> .
Captain Caroline Coates	was a member of the study team investigating the employment of the WRNS in 1988/89.
Rear Admiral Richard Cobbold	in the rank of captain, was in command of HMS <i>Brilliant</i> , the first ship to take female volunteers for service at sea in 1990.
Air Commodore Cynthia Fowler	in the rank of group captain, was Deputy Director WRAF for 18 months between 1989 and 1991. She went on to command RAF Uxbridge and was the third female officer to achieve air commodore rank in open competition with men.
Squadron Leader Helen Gardiner (née Dobbs)	as an undergraduate, attended East Midlands University Air Squadron. After completing her degree, she joined the RAF as a pilot. She gained her wings in 1993. She went on to become the first female fighter pilot, flying Tornado F3 aircraft on 43 Squadron.
Flight Lieutenant Julie Gibson	commissioned into the RAF as an engineering officer. She transferred to pilot training in 1990. She was the first woman in the regular Service to be awarded her wings (1991). She went on to fly Andover communication aircraft with 32 Squadron before being selected to fly Hercules transport aircraft. She was the first woman to become a captain on Hercules.
Flight Lieutenant Dawn Hadlow (née Bradley)	as an undergraduate, attended London University Air Squadron. After completing her degree, she joined the RAF as a pilot. She gained her wings in 1992. She was the first woman to qualify as a flying instructor.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom	was Minister for the Armed Forces from July 1988 - May 1993.
Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Peter Harding	was appointed as Chief of the Air Staff in January 1989. He subsequently became Chief of Defence Staff.
Commodore John Hart	was Secretary to Commander in Chief Fleet (1991-1993) and subsequently Chief Staff Officer (Personnel and Logistics) on the staff of Flag Officer Surface Flotilla (1993-1996).
Air Vice Marshal Robert Honey	was the Air Secretary 1989 - 1994. He was responsible for career planning and appointing of all RAF personnel.
Air Commodore Joan Hopkins	was a fighter control specialist. As a group captain she was the first woman to command an operational station. She was the second woman to reach air commodore in open competition with men.
Baroness Howe of Idlicote	served as Deputy Chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission from 1975-79. In 1990 she chaired the Hansard Society's Commission, resulting in the publication of the report <i>Women at the Top</i> .
Commandant Anthea Larken (née Saville)	joined the WRNS as a Wren rating in the role of weapon analyst. On commissioning, she specialised in photographic interpretation. She was the first WRNS officer to attend the Royal College of Defence Studies. She was the penultimate Director of the WRNS serving in that role from 1988 – 1991.
Rear Admiral John Lippiett	was a seaman officer who was military assistant to the First Sea Lord (December 1988 - December 1990). He later commanded HMS <i>Norfolk</i> as captain of 9th Frigate Squadron. He went on to serve as Flag Officer Sea Training.
Captain Julia Massey	was a member of the Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service. She served as a nursing sister on the high dependency ward of the SS <i>Uganda</i> hospital ship during the Falklands War.
Air Commodore Ruth Montague	was the Deputy Director of the WRAF from 1986. She became Director in the rank of air commodore in 1989 and served in that role until 1994.
Commander Jackie Mulholland	was Deputy Director WRNS from August 1990 to April 1993.

Flight Lieutenant Wendy Nichols (née Smith)	was the second woman to qualify as a navigator. Already serving in the photographic interpretation specialisation, she transferred to aircrew in 1990. In 1992 she joined 30 Squadron, flying Hercules transport aircraft.
Vice Admiral Sir Ned Purvis	served as Director General of Naval Manning and Training and oversaw the 1988/89 study into employment of the WRNS.
Air Commodore Helen Renton	was the Director of the WRAF from February 1980 to 1986.
Commander Maggie Robbins	was the final Deputy Director WRNS (Apr - Oct 1993). She continued in the RN in a variety of staff and administrative appointments, including Assistant Director (Equal Opportunities) (May 1998 - December 2000). Her final tour of duty was as the base commander of HMS Excellent. She retired in 2006.
Flight Lieutenant Jo Salter	joined the RAF in 1989 to become an engineering officer but took the opportunity to become a pilot when RAF policy changed. She gained her wings in April 1992 and went on to become the first woman to qualify to fly fast jets. She joined 617 Squadron to fly Tornado ground attack aircraft.
Freydis Sharland	was a pilot in the Air Transport Auxiliary from 1942. She flew about forty aircraft types during the war, including Hurricanes and Spitfires.
Captain Julia Simpson	was deputy secretary of the military committee of NATO in Brussels from 1989-91. In 1990, while in that appointment, she was secretary to the committee on women in the NATO forces.
Lieutenant Commander Elaine Smith	was a communications specialist who volunteered for service at sea. She undertook a training assignment in HMS <i>Fearless</i> .
Commandant Anne Spencer	joined the WRNS in 1962 and served as the last Director WRNS (1991 - 1993).
Air Commodore Joy Tamblin	was the Director of the WRAF from October 1976 to February 1980.
Flight Lieutenant Keren Watkins (née Cavaciuti)	as an undergraduate, attended the University Air Squadron of Wales. After completing her degree, she joined the RAF as a pilot. She gained her wings in 1993. She was selected to become a flying instructor and subsequently went on to become the first woman to fly single-seat fast jets. She flew Jaguar aircraft on 54 Squadron.

- Admiral Lord West** in the rank of captain, in the autumn of 1988 was appointed to do a study into the future employment of the WRNS. He went on to become First Sea Lord.
- Rear Admiral Nick Wilkinson** as a captain, was Secretary to First Sea Lord. Later, as a rear admiral, he served as Director General Naval Manning and Training.
- Commander Rosie Wilson** became Deputy Director WRNS in October 1989, then deputy head of Sea Service Implementation Team.

Interview - Not Recorded

- Russell Potts** was a civil servant who served in a variety of Ministry of Defence jobs. He was seconded to the Prices and Incomes Board (1969-70) to revise the pay structure of the armed forces. He acted as secretary to the 1974 study into the future role of the WRNS.

Appendix 3: Women's Roles for Regular Service

Women's Royal Naval Service - Ratings' Categories of Work at December 1947⁵ and November 1951⁶

Category	December 1947	1951	Remarks
General Service			
Cinema Operator	√	√	Previously declared obsolescent but re-instated.
Clothing	√	√	
Cook (O)	√	√	
Cook (S)	√	√	
Dental Surgery Attendant		√	New trade
Education and Vocational Training Instructor	√	√	
Hairdresser	√	√	
Mess Caterer	√		
Motor Transport Driver	√	√	
Quarters Assistant	√	√	
Radar Plot		√	Probable re-establishment of wartime role
Regulating ⁷	√	√	
Sick Berth Attendant		√	New trade
(Wren) Signals	√	√	
Steward (General)	√	√	
Steward (Officers)	√	√	
Switchboard Operator	√	√	Previously declared obsolescent but re-instated.
Tailoress	√	√	
Telegraphist	√	√	Previously declared obsolete but re-instated.
Victualling	√	√	
Welfare Worker	√	√	
Writer ⁸ (General)	√	√	
Writer (Pay)	√	√	

⁵ NMRN: 1988.350.1-5, BR 1077(47) Regulations and Instructions WRNS, Appendices 3 & 4, 31 Dec 1947, promulgated 1948.

⁶ Ibid, BR 1077(51) Regulations and Instructions WRNS, Appendix 2, 6 Nov 1951.

⁷ 'Regulators' were disciplinary staff.

⁸ Clerical staff were referred to as 'writers'.

Category	December 1947	1951	Remarks
Writer (Shorthand)	√	√	
Naval Aviation Categories			
Aircraft Direction	√		Not listed in 1951.
Air Mechanic ⁹		√	Previously declared obsolete but re-instated.
Air Stores	√	√	
Meteorological	√	√	Previously declared obsolescent but re-instated.
Naval Airwoman (see footnote 5)	√		Previously declared obsolete but re-instated.
Range Assessor	√	√	
Radio (Air)		√	Renaming of category
Wren (Radio) (AR) and (AW)	√		Renamed above.

⁹ Air Mechanics were re-named Naval Airwomen in November 1946 (NMRN: 1988.350.57, Admiralty Working Party on the Permanent WRNS Rating Force, notes of a meeting held on 6 Nov 1946). The term air mechanic was re-introduced in 1950 (NMRN: 1988.350.1-5, BR 1077(51) Regulations and Instructions WRNS, 6 Nov 1951).

Women's Royal Naval Service - Proposed Substitution Roles for Officers at August 1946

The total strength of the WRNS officer corps was expected to be 500. All officers would train in administrative duties for the management of the WRNS as well as training as specialists if substituting for men. This list shows the expected distribution of female officers in specialist work in the early stages of planning for regular service.

WRNS Officers in Substitution for Men

Category	Bid Aug 1946 ¹⁰	Remarks by Rear Admiral Denny ¹¹	Plan Oct 1946 ¹²
Meteorological	25	To release instructor officers for other duties. Requires long training.	25
Safety Equipment	8	Questionable whether specialist role can be afforded in post war Air Arm. Duties could perhaps be absorbed into other roles.	8
Armament Stores	12	To replace [male] warrant officers. Women would be promoted from Wrens Air Mechanic (Ordnance) category, hence dependent on future of that category. Long technical course.	-
Air Radio Officers	20	To replace male officers and warrant officers. No difficulty with the provision of training. Dependent on the future of Wren Air Radio mechanics.	16
Communications	6	To be employed mostly in instructing Wrens. Probably replacing senior (male) ratings rather than officers. A useful outlet for a few Wren communication ratings.	6
Secretariat	70	Include Confidential Book duties. Quite straightforward and clearly replace men.	70
Pay and Cash	15	Quite straightforward. Numbers limited by the difficulty of [male] senior Writer ratings working under them.	15

¹⁰ NMRN: 1988.350.58-9, Permanent WRNS Officer Force, Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel, circulated 20 Aug 1946.

¹¹ Ibid. Rear Admiral Denny's remarks have been abbreviated and edited.

¹² TNA: WO 32/13160, Structure and Conditions of Service for the Permanent WRNS Officer Corps, Oct 1946.

Category	Bid Aug 1946 ¹⁰	Remarks by Rear Admiral Denny ¹¹	Plan Oct 1946 ¹²
Air Stores	8	Same remarks as for Pay and Cash.	8
Catering	15	Replacing warrant officer Stewards etc. Pre-war, these would have been civilian posts. Policy changed to allow an outlet for Stewards ashore as well as afloat.	15
Clothing and Victualling	12	Replacing warrant officers. Providing an outlet for the large number of victualling and clothing Wrens in the permanent force.	12
Cipher	10	A total of 30 cipher officers of which 10 of the UK based shore billets could be filled by WRNS officers. A useful officer outlet for rating categories having no officer equivalent as the conversion course would not be too difficult.	-
Photographic Interpretation	-		3
Total	201		178*

*Posts on the complement also attracted a 'margin' - an allowance of personnel over and above the established figure to allow for personnel between postings, on long training courses or other diversions. The allowance was 15% in 1947. Thus an additional 27 women would be allowed to replace the notional 27 male manning margin on these 178 posts. This brought the total number of men to be replaced by women to 205.

Trades Open to Airwomen - August 1949¹³

Trades were grouped by skill level and pay. Thus they appeared in more than one group, with personnel trained as 'fitter', 'mechanic', 'assistant' or 'orderly'.

Trade	Notes
Group A	
Electrician grade I	
Fitter grade II airframe	
Fitter grade II engine	
Fitter motor transport	
Instrument repairer grade I	
Radar fitter - air	
Radar fitter - ground	
Wireless fitter	
Group B	
Aircraft finisher	
Cook	
Dental hygienist	
Dispenser	Wartime trade disestablished. Re-instated by August 1949.
Electrician grade II	
Flight mechanic - airframe	
Flight mechanic - engine	
Instrument repair grade II	
Laboratory assistant	
Masseuse	
Mental nursing orderly	
Motor transport mechanic	
Operating room assistant	
Photographer	
Radar mechanic - air	
Radar mechanic - ground	
Radar operator	
Radiographer	
Safety equipment worker	
Wireless /teleprinter operator	
Wireless mechanic - air	
Wireless mechanic - ground	

¹³ TNA: AIR 2/13967, Air Ministry Pamphlet 103, 10th edition, Jan 1949 and 11th edition, Aug 1949.

Group C	
Administrative	
Airframe assistant	
Clerk accounting	
Clerk equipment accounting	
Clerk general duties	
Clerk general duties personnel selection	
Clerk general duties postal	Trade re-opened to women in 1949 having previously been reserved post-war for national servicemen.
Clerk pay accounting	
Clerk provisioning.	Trade re-opened to women in 1949 having previously been reserved post-war for national servicemen.
Cook	
Dental clerk orderly	
Driver MT	
Electrical assistant	
Engine assistant	
Equipment assistant	
Fabric worker	
Fighter plotter	Trade added in 1949.
Hairdresser	
Instrument assistant	
Interpreter	
Model maker's assistant	Wartime trade disestablished. Re-instated in 1949 at 'assistant' grade.
Musician	
Nursing orderly	
Operations clerk	Trade added in 1949.
Radar assistant - air	
Radar assistant - ground	
Radar operator	
Radio telephony operator	
Safety equipment assistant	
Tailor	Previous wartime trade re-established in 1949.
Telephonist	
Teleprinter operator	
Tracer	
Wireless assistant - air	
Wireless assistant - ground	
WRAF physical training instructor	
WRAF police	

Group D	
Administrative orderly	
Flight orderly	
Messing orderly	
Messing orderly, batwoman (sic)	
Messing orderly - mess steward	
Messing orderly - waitress	Previous wartime trade re-established in 1949.
Technical orderly	

WRAF Officers - Post-war Branches and Numbers at April 1949¹⁴

Number of officers	
Branch Title	Apr 1949
G* (women only)	171
Technical Branch**	1
Administrative and Special Duties	11
Equipment Branch	67
Secretarial Branch	232
Education Branch	5
Provost Branch	7
Catering Branch	21
Total	515

* 'G' was the designation for women officers employed solely on administration of the WRAF. It may have stood for 'general'. The branch was subsumed into the Secretarial Branch in 1950.

** Technical Branch comprised three formerly separate designations: engineering, armaments and signals.

This list excludes the professional branches of medical, dental, legal, chaplains and musicians. Medical women were entered into the RAF branch and not listed separately as WRAF.

RAF Officer Roles not open to WRAF

General Duties (pilots, navigators, air signallers, air gunners, air engineers)
 RAF Regiment
 Aircraft Control
 Marine Branch
 Physical Fitness
 Airfield Construction Branch

¹⁴ *Air Force List*, (London: HMSO, April 1949).

Appendix 4: Directors of the WRNS and the WAAF/WRAF

WRNS

Vera Laughton Mathews	Apr 39 – Nov 46
Jocelyn Woollcombe	Nov 46 – Nov 50
Mary Lloyd	Nov 50 – Dec 54
Nancy Robertson	Dec 54 – Apr 58
Elizabeth Hoyer-Millar	Apr 58 – May 61
Jean Davies	May 61 – Jun 64
Margaret Drummond	Jun 64 – Jun 67
Marion Kettlewell	Jun 67 – Jul 70
Daphne Blundell	Jul 70 – Jul 73
Mary Talbot	Jul 73 – Jul 76
Vonla McBride	Jul 76 – Jul 79
Elizabeth Craig McFeely	Jul 79 – Jul 82
Patricia Swallow	Jul 82 – Feb 86
Marjorie Fletcher	Feb 86 – Mar 88
Anthea Larken	Mar 88 – Mar 91
Anne Spencer	Mar 91 – Oct 93

WAAF/WRAF

Katherine Jane Trefusis-Forbes	Jan 39 - Oct 43
Ruth Mary Eldridge Welsh	Oct 43 - Nov 46
Felicity Hanbury	Dec 46 - Jun 50
Nancy Salmon	Jul 50 - Aug 56
Henrietta Barnet	Aug 56 - Mar 60
Anne Stephens	Mar 60 - Mar 63
Jean Conan-Doyle	Apr 63 - Apr 66
Felicity Hill	Apr 66 - Jul 69
Philippa Marshall	Jul 69 - Jul 73
Molly Allott	Jul 73 - Oct 76
Joy Tamblin	Oct 76 - Feb 80
Helen Renton	Feb 80 - Jan 86
Shirley Jones	Jan 86 - Nov 89
Ruth Montague	Nov 89 - Apr 94

Appendix 5: Aircraft and Roles Approved for Female Pilots and Navigators - July 1989¹⁵

Operational Aircraft

Airborne Early Warning:

- Sentry

Communications:

- Andover
- BAe 146
- HS 125

Reconnaissance

- Canberra
- Nimrod

Transport and Air-to-Air Refuelling Aircraft:

- Hercules
- Tristar
- VC10 and VC10k
- Victor

Helicopters - Search and Rescue:

- Sea King
- Wessex

Training Aircraft

- Bulldog
- Chipmunk
- Dominie
- Gazelle
- Hawk
- Jet Provost
- Jetstream
- Tucano
- Wessex

¹⁵ FOI AHB: Correspondence: 'Female Aircrew in the RAF', Chief of Air Staff to Under Secretary of State (Armed Forces), 4 Jul 1989.

Appendix 6: First Batch of Mixed Ships - Complement of Female Ratings¹⁶

		<i>Brilliant</i> ¹	<i>Invincible</i> ²	<i>Juno</i> ³	<i>Battleaxe</i> ⁴
Radio Operator	Petty Officer		1		
	Leading Hand	1	1		1
	Able	4	17	3	4
Radar	Petty Officer		1		
	Leading Hand				
	Able	5	14	3	5
Weapons Analyst	Able		1		
Writer	Chief Petty Officer		1		
	Petty Officer		1		
	Leading Hand	1	1	1	1
	Able	1	4	1	1
Stores Accountant	Leading Hand	1			1
	Able	1	5	1	1
Cook	Leading Hand		1		
Steward	Able	2	12	2	2
Physical Training	Chief Petty Officer		1		
Regulator	Chief Petty Officer		1		
	Leading Hand		1		
Meteor-ological Observer	Able		1		
Photo-grapher	Leading Hand		1		
Aircraft Engineer-ing	Leading Rate		1		
	Able		5		
QARNNS			2		
Totals		3 Leading Hands and 13 Able Rate	6 Senior Rates, 6 Leading Hands, 59 Able Rate, 2 Nurses	1 Leading Hand and 10 Able Rate	3 Leading Hand and 13 Able Rate

Notes:

1. HMS *Brilliant* (Type 22 frigate) was the first ship with women in its complement.

¹⁶ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service - Situation Report, 13 Dec 1990. The report did not give figures for the number of female officers or the total ships' complements.

2. Two women of the Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service (QARNNS) were also serving in HMS *Invincible* (aircraft carrier).
3. HMS *Juno* (Leander class frigate in use as a training ship) was mixed complement from 10 December 1990.
4. HMS *Battleaxe* (Type 22 frigate) was mixed complement from 11 January 1991.

In addition, there were 31 women in Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Argus* of whom 30 belonged to the QARNNS and 1 was a Wren (Dental Surgery Assistant). This ship was a casualty receiving ship for the Gulf War of 1991.

Leading Hand is a junior non-commissioned officer rank.

Petty Officers and Chief Petty Officers are senior non-commissioned officer ranks.

Appendix 7: Complement Plan (Frigates and Above): 1991-94¹⁷

	Ship	Officers*	Senior Rates*	Junior Rates*
1991	<i>Sirius</i>	4	2	21
	<i>Fearless</i>	6	9	50
	<i>Brazen</i>	5	6	32
	<i>Cornwall</i>	5	6	24
	<i>Ark Royal</i>	8	6	72
	<i>Broadsword</i>	5	6	18
	<i>Sheffield</i>	5	6	32
	<i>Cardiff</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Liverpool</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Southampton</i>	5	6	30
1992	<i>Glasgow</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Cumberland</i>	5	6	24
	<i>Ambuscade</i>	4	6	24
	<i>Coventry</i>	5	6	32
	<i>Scylla</i>	5	3	19
	<i>Arrow</i>	4	6	24
	<i>Campbeltown</i>	5	6	24
	<i>Exeter</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Norfolk</i>	3	4	24
	<i>Brave</i>	5	6	32
	<i>Manchester</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Chatham</i>	5	6	24
1993	<i>Gloucester</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Active</i>	4	6	24
	<i>York</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Boxer</i>	5	6	32
	<i>London</i>	5	6	32
	<i>Alacrity</i>	4	6	24
	<i>Edinburgh</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Illustrious</i>	10	8	100
1994	<i>Birmingham</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Newcastle</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Nottingham</i>	5	6	30
	<i>Avenger</i>	4	6	24
Totals		171	200	1072

* Target capacities. One or more junior rates' mess decks were made over to women. For a ship with 24 to a mess, this capped the number of junior rate women who could be accommodated.

In addition, HMS *Bristol* in its role as a training ship was expected to take 20 female officers under training from 1991.

¹⁷ FOI Fleet: WRNS Sea Service - Situation Report, 13 Dec 1990.

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